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MISJUDGED

BY

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MISJUDGED.

CHAPTER I.

"AND now, my dear fellow, since I have expressed in two closely-written pages my delight at hearing from you again after a silence of five years, I will proceed to answer all your questions. But I must say once more that you cannot imagine what a pleasure your letter gave me—though I have already enlarged on that.

"In the first place, you ask: 'What have you been doing with yourself?' My dear Wolf, I have entered on a new life, just as you have done—whether a better one or not, you shall be the judge.

"When we had shaken hands for the last time in Berlin, as you seated yourself in the third-class carriage of the Hamburg train which was to carry you to the Brazilian steamer, I was left standing there for a long time after the train had disappeared, feeling that I should have done better to go too, for there seemed nothing left for me in my own country.

"You know how it was—not a penny did I possess, or, at any rate, very little; my pictures were unsold, and my father had just informed me that he could not

give me any more assistance, for the simple reason that he was nearly at the point of starvation himself, with his wife and daughter, since he had been pensioned off.

“ And why did I not go with you ? I do not know myself, now. But the fact is I stayed behind, and the next day I set up my easel in the Harz, with all my worldly goods—that is, with a few thalers a friend had lent me, Andreas, you know. You know that lonely forest-house in the neighborhood of the Brocken ; you know the low room over the kitchen, and the red-haired young forester’s wife with the dazzling white skin and the strange, reddish-brown eyes, a beautiful woman. Do you remember how that whimsical fellow, the forester, told us one stormy night that she was a witch who had slipped through the key-hole, the previous April, just at midnight, into his lonely kitchen ; that she had lost her balance as she was riding on her broom-stick high up in the air, and so she had got a good husband by it ? I can hear her laugh now as she listened to him—and she was really a witch. Well, I meant to paint there, as I had done so often before, and wait on destiny ; I *must* sell a picture some time in Munich or Berlin.

“ I will spare you the details of that time. I went there in June, and autumn found me still there—and still without money. I did not care to follow my father’s advice to become a decorative or scene painter, and one day I found myself wandering restlessly through the woods, in a frame of mind which I cannot describe to you. I had borrowed a gun of the forester, and, when I came to what I

thought was a very lonely spot, I put it against my breast and pulled the trigger. I shot myself—not dead, as I had hoped, but badly enough to make me ill for a long time.

“Then, of course, comes the old story of unconsciousness, of waking to life in a comfortable room, with a beautiful nurse sitting by the bed-side, with whom one falls in love straightway, and ends by marrying. And it all happened in the usual way, except for the falling in love. When, after my long illness, I went down into the garden of the iron manufacturer Frey—it was April then—I asked Fräulein Anna Frey, or “Antje,” as she was called—her mother is Dutch by birth—if she would marry a poor fellow like me, and she accepted me without a moment’s hesitation. What induced her to do it I have never been able to understand to this day.

“Heaven knows that at that time I was not a very eligible *parti*. I never spoke a word of love to her, and yet she said yes, notwithstanding the fact that both her parents wore very long faces when they learned their daughter’s choice.

“We were just married, were still absent on our wedding journey, when her father died. She would rather have stayed with her mother then, at the iron-works, where the hammers were going day and night. She said her mother would be glad to build us a pleasant villa in the midst of the wood, from which Antje could reach her father’s house in four or five minutes. Of course I objected—the very thought of this mother-in-law’s idyl made me shiver; and so she left her stately mother alone in her home, for

the latter had grasped the reins of the great business immediately after her husband's death, and managed it as skilfully and as firmly as he had done. But Antje went away with me to make a new home.

"We settled down here in the immediate neighborhood of Dresden. We have a stately old house at the foot of the vine-covered hills, though we are still high above the valley of the Elbe, in the midst of a great, park-like garden. Augustus the Strong built it, as a gift to one of the ladies to whom he was attached. It is called "Sibyllenburg." In the upper hall—which was the chief inducement to us to buy this place—I have fitted up a studio which might satisfy the most fastidious artist. It extends the whole length of the house, and is divided in two by a great Smyrna *portière*. My easel is placed in the north window; before the open balcony door, on the south, is my writing-table, and whenever I lift my eyes I can look out over the terraced foreground, over country-houses, villages, and green fields across to the mountains on the other side of the Elbe; on the right, to the point where the Albrechtsburg towers over Meissen; on the left to the towers of Dresden. If I wish to go the city, I have the carriage out, or take one of the express trains which have to stop in the village because the connections——

"But, upon my word, I am forgetting your chief question—yes, it is underlined in your letter: 'Above all, tell me about your wife.'

"Old fellow, how shall I manage it without boring you? You ask: 'Is she one of those slender,

capricious, fanciful women you used to admire so much when we were in Berlin ? ’

“No, Wolf, no ! She is not a brunette ; she is a blonde, with the hair that Titian lived to paint. She is tall, but—‘swaying in the breeze like a palm ’ ! Oh, no ! Rather like a strong young beech in her native woods. She would be called without flattery a handsome, stately woman. She has a dainty round head, a full face, with a short, straight nose, red lips which she often forgets to shut, and which thus give her an expression of childish wonder, and a pair of clear, greenish-brown eyes—‘Nixie’s eyes,’ people call them. When shaded by the long, dark lashes which curve upward, they look as if there were unfathomable depths in them. But, Wolf, you are my oldest and best friend ; to you I will say that these unfathomable depths are a delusion—it is only shallow water. . . .

“I have been wondering for some time how I shall get it off my pen—of force of character and intellect, Wolf, there is not the slightest vestige. Unfortunately I am forced to acknowledge that—she is an *utter nonentity*.

“I will give you an instance of it. On our wedding journey we went to Haarlem, her mother’s birth-place. Antje was radiant at having found out by the description the gabled old house in the market-place in which the worthy lady first saw the light of day. She wanted to go straight in and ask the good people who were eating their dinner, to let her go through all the rooms. I was obliged to use all my powers of persuasion to get her away, and at last I said : ‘Come, child, I am aching to get to Franz Hals.’

She looked at me with wide-open mouth. 'Franz Hals?' she said at length. 'Who is he? Where does he live? I did not know you knew anybody here, Leo.'

"I cannot tell you what I felt at that moment, Wolf! I said to myself: 'And this is an *artist's* wife—*my* wife!' I believe I was angry. I told her she ought to be ashamed of her ignorance; I said I could not comprehend how it was possible that she had never heard the name of one of the most celebrated of the Dutch painters, she who had Dutch blood in her veins! She followed me in abashed silence, and dutifully stood with me before those wonderful pictures, without saying a word, only afterward she asked me shyly if those pictures were really so beautiful.

"Good Heavens, Wolf, I was quite crushed! And so it is in everything. I talk to her at dinner, for instance; she raises those unfathomable eyes to me and inquires: 'What did you say, Leo?' I repeat my sentence. 'Indeed? I don't know, I am sure.' Or she says simply: 'Ah!' Or, worse still, she tries to enter into the conversation. Then she gets red and stammers, gets confused, and at length in despair urges me to try some dish that is really excellent, for she is absolute mistress of the art of cooking and of housekeeping, my friend.

"I can hear you say: 'That is something, at all events, and something very desirable.' But I require more from my companion for life. She ought to understand my profession and its needs; and yet, as you can easily perceive, it is impossible to talk with her about art. The poor child is really

color-blind ; she mixes up Van Eyck with Van Dyck, and talks of varnishing oil-paintings. I get irritated and make myself disagreeable, and *she* cries and leaves the room, and we finally make it up over the cradle of our little daughter, who looks up at me with precisely the same eyes, opens her mouth in just the same way, and, unhappily, seems to be constructed on the same simple system as her mamma.

“As I said before, she cries after these scenes—but she cries after a fashion of her own. She shuts her mouth then, her lips are drawn down at the corners and begin to quiver, and suddenly two big drops hang on her long, curved lashes ; you cannot help wondering how they got there. Not a feature of her face changes ; she does not wring her hands as other people do ; she does not sob aloud ; her handkerchief is not wringing wet ; she does not stamp her foot, or throw herself into a chair, nor does she knock the vases off the table—she keeps as still as a mouse. The servants never know there has been a quarrel, but—good Heavens, I think I could stand almost anything else !

“In fact, Wolf, I married her in haste to save myself from ruin, and I am her debtor in every way. I do not deny that she has good qualities, and yet—it is hard.

“You ask me whether I am still a painter. Yes. And whether I am happy. That is hard to say. I feel sure I should have made my way had not my wife—but I will tell you about it. I know very well, Wolf, you never liked to hear of my profession. You said some harsh things to me once

in a bitter hour, that almost broke the bonds of friendship between us; you declared I should never get beyond a certain dilettanteism; that I ought only to employ my talent as a recreation while devoting myself to some solid career by which I could earn my bread. I remember it distinctly, and I have thought of it a hundred times when I have made my failures. But I cannot yet bring myself to believe it, and so I still go on painting. Once I had a stroke of luck. I sold the picture of the red-haired woodland beauty, under the title, 'A Witch of the Brocken,' and had the pleasure of hearing it well spoken of. But since then? I have kept on painting as I did before. I painted *genre* pictures, and I painted landscapes, but no one would buy my poor things. No one noticed them, no one even found fault with them. In the exhibitions they were always hung in the worst places, either in the darkest corner or in a totally bad light, and they always returned with touching devotion to the arms of their creator. Happily, there is still plenty of room in our big house, and if in the course of years that gets filled up, I can always fit you out with painted canvases, for—but just let me tell you.

“When our little girl was about three months old I went one day into my mother-in-law's sitting-room. We did not have any home of our own then. We had bought this place, but it was not furnished, and I stayed in the quiet woodland valley for the sake of my wife and child. Well, then, I went into my mother-in-law's sitting-room and stopped suddenly, charmed by the picture before me. Thanks

to the century-old linden trees before the windows, there was a genuine Rembrandtesque darkness in the room, and you can picture to yourself an antique arm-chair in the midst of the curious old Dutch furniture, with old Faience plates and blackened family portraits on the walls. Fancy in these surroundings a woman's figure bending her head over the child in her arms. A single golden ray of sunlight just rested on the shimmering hair, a Raphael has painted it in the Sistine Madonna. It was the first time, Wolf, that I was charmed and carried away by my wife. 'Antje,' I said, 'I must paint you like that.'

"She raised her head and smiled at me pleasantly. I began the next day. It was a beautiful picture, Wolf. Every one who saw it said so. It would have made a sensation at the Exhibition. And it was a perfect likeness. She sat in the curious old arm-chair in her white, airy morning-dress, her head bent down over the child, and the sunshine lighting up her golden hair—not a Madonna, though suggesting one, but more human, more touching, appealing more to the heart.

"It seems absurd to you, Wolf, no doubt, that I should praise my own work like this, and I cannot even prove to you that the praise was deserved—for the picture no longer exists. When I was having it packed up to send it to the Exhibition in Berlin, my mother-in-law declared that she did not wish to have her daughter exhibited like that. It was improper, it was immoral, and she could not understand how I could be willing to expose Antje in her morning-dress to so many strange eyes.

“I stared at her, quite stupefied ; then Antje, too, blushing deeply, begged me to keep the picture for myself. She, too, seemed to consider it a want of delicacy in me to be willing to exhibit a portrait of her. I looked from the original to the picture and began to explain to her patiently the reasons which prompted me to exhibit *this* picture of all others. She listened to me with downcast eyes, and when at the close of my long harangue I thought I had convinced her that no one had a right to hide away a work of art, that it was her duty and mine to take a step forward in the world by means of this really admirable picture, that almost all the great painters had painted their wives, to the great delight of their fellow-men, she only shook her head and repeated for the hundredth time her imploring, ‘Ah, please don’t do it, Leo!’

“Still, I did not give up the battle, but after three days of infinite trouble on my part and obstinate refusal on hers, I lost patience ; I got angry, and slit the canvas up and down with a sharp knife, ordered the servant to make up a fire in the fireplace, and burned it with my own hand. Antje stood by till the last spark had died out, looking as white as chalk, and then she left the room without a word. But I suffered more from the whole affair than you can imagine.

“Since then I have given my wife to understand that her presence in my studio is not exactly desired—and she understands me. She has never entered the room since she helped me to arrange it. What is there here to interest her ?

“I keep on painting. Formerly I did it out of am-

bition and hunger ; now the ambition still remains, but it is dimmer than when it was joined to necessity. I look about for something to arouse my enthusiasm and I find nothing. Just now I have a canvas on my easel, again a woman's portrait. I am painting a neighbor of ours, Baroness Erlach, an interesting person, a widow about thirty-two. When she was a girl of eighteen she married a man sixty-four, who died in the course of nature, when she was twenty-six. Her two sons are at the Military School ; for herself, when she is not here in her splendid old country-house, she is everywhere and nowhere—in Paris, London, or St. Petersburg ; neither the North Cape nor the Pyramids are safe from her. She knows the world thoroughly ; she is gay, witty, sometimes with a spice of malice, and has the exterior of a woman who lives more by candle-light than in the sunshine. Pale, delicate, and slender, she has great brown eyes, with that peculiar expression sometimes given by excessive short-sightedness, and, which is often most effective, that soft, appealing look which hardly seems to accord with the rather roguish face. I am painting her in the rich Spanish costume of a noble lady of the sixteenth century, in the Stuart cap trimmed with pearls, the high lace ruff, and in a red velvet dress open at the throat. She comes every morning at nine o'clock, and generally stays to dinner with us. Before the picture vanishes into the twilight of its destination—she is very mysterious about the name of its future possessor—I shall exhibit it in Dresden, that is to say, my dear Wolf, if I ever succeed in finishing it. For Antje—this is another drawback

—possesses, among many other delightful qualities, the Philistine one of bitter jealousy. She is not fond of the Baroness, and she makes it manifest to her on all possible occasions, and yesterday she put the finishing touch to her icy reserve by simply leaving the room, during dessert, driven away by a few anecdotes which apparently offended her sense of propriety. The consequence was that the amiable original of the Spanish lady soon went home, and excused herself from coming to-day on the plea of nervous headache, which is a very good excuse, but which shows me very plainly that as a married man I must suffer for my wife's rudeness.

“This is the way matters stand, Wolf. You see I am still the same old enthusiast, who shrinks from sober reality, and tries in vain to gild it ; the passionate man with his too strong affections, who has always had the misfortune, when he was ready to give himself entirely, to have his hopes dashed by a stream of cold water. Wolf, can you feel with me what it is to live always among petty natures ?

“You see, I know that she is an excellent, perfectly upright woman ; she does not know the meaning of the word passion, she will never take a step aside from the path of duty or of honor. But neither would she ever forgive such a lapse ; and, what is worse, would never understand it. We are like fire and water together.

“Come soon. I will come to Dresden to meet you.

“Your

“LEOPOLD.”

The writer of these lines folded up the several sheets, put them into an envelope, addressed it, sealed it, and then sat leaning back in his arm-chair for a few minutes absolutely motionless. The autumn sunshine shed a warm glow into the elegant, richly-furnished room, lighting up the pale colors of the Smyrna *portière* which divided the room, and the carpet which covered the floor, and rested on the pictures in their broad gold frames which hung behind the occupant's back. They were for the most part landscapes, but there were also single portraits, studies, all painted in a peculiar style. Leo Jussnitz was a disciple of the modern realistic school; the gnarled oaks, the clouds in the stormy sky, the harsh light on the sea, were all sketchily flung on the canvas, though with a certain force. The reeds in the foreground almost cast a shadow, so thickly were the colors put on. It could not be denied that there was character in these landscapes, but the amateurishness was also not to be denied.

Leo himself looked up at a picture placed on an easel behind the low writing-table. It was the portrait of a woman, life-size; a slender figure in a red velvet dress, leaning against a pillar and looking out at the spectator with languishing brown eyes. With the brown hair, the languid smile on the lips, which were much too full for the small pale face, it was like one of Makart's creations.

A satisfied smile crept over the dark face of the painter, to which a well-tended moustache lent a military air. He got up, walked across to the north window, and stopped before the easel on which was

placed the picture of the beautiful baroness. There he dipped his finger into a shallow glass dish filled with water, which was standing on the table, and drew it across the hair which peeped out from under the Stuart cap. The golden lights in the chestnut waves came out more clearly, and an expression of satisfaction brightened up his face. He nodded at the beautiful woman's face, went to the window, opened it, and called out: "The carriage in ten minutes!"

Then he disappeared into an adjoining room, and in a few minutes had changed his brown velvet coat for an elegant walking suit, asked the servant if his mistress was in her room, and when the latter replied that he thought Frau Jussnitz was downstairs, a frown appeared for a moment on his forehead, and he ordered the servant to say that he should not be home that evening. With a lighted cigar between his fingers, he ran down-stairs; he would not have entered the housekeeper's rooms at any price.

A young woman was standing in the hall before an enormous antique linen-press, just behind the broad staircase; she wore a plain black silk dress, over which was a very costly fichu of beautiful old lace, caught up in the manner of those Marie Antoinette was so fond of wearing. On her arm she carried a key-basket, and her hands seemed to be wandering aimlessly among the linen, for she pushed and pulled about the packages arranged with such painstaking care, without taking any out. A pale young face turned toward the master of the house, and a pair of wonderfully clear, greenish

eyes looked up at him with a glance of anxious inquiry.

"Leo," she called out to him in a low voice—

"Leo, are you going to drive?"

He turned quickly.

"Yes, as you can see, Antje," he said, with the air of a man who is vexed at being detained.

The pale face flushed up to the golden hair.

"To-day, Leo?"

"To be sure! Or do you want me for anything?" The voice sounded very cold and very impatient.

She leaned against the carved press and twisted the delicate blue ribbons, which tied together the dazzlingly white linen, about her fingers in evident embarrassment. The pale pink of her cheeks had deepened to a crimson flush.

"I thought, Leo," she began, but was checked by the glance that met hers.

"You wanted me to stay at home, Antje? Then you should have said so before and I would have sent a telegram. Now it is too late; they are expecting me."

"They expect you, Leo? Oh, that is another thing!" she said. There was a perceptible change in her voice, as if she were suffering severe pain. He did not perceive it, evidently, for he asked:

"Have you any commissions in Dresden, Antje?"

"Nothing, Leo——"

"Then good-by!"

He pressed her hand for a moment to his lips and was gone.

"This confounded indifference!" he murmured, as he got into the carriage. "If the woman would only ask for something *once*, would defy me *once*—but this everlasting monotony! Even her way of being jealous is enough to bore me to extinction. The clothes-press and the kitchen are the end and aim of her existence."

As he drove away he unconsciously glanced up at a window in the first story; a child's face framed in fair hair was pressed against the pane. He threw a kiss at her, but the child did not stir, and not the slightest look of recognition lighted up the soft features.

"The mother all over!" he muttered, as he drove away into the reddening autumn evening. "The mother all over!"





CHAPTER II.

FRAU ANTJE remained standing for a while before her clothes-press, trying to untie a knot which she had made as she played with the ribbon, but the effort seemed entirely mechanical, for when a servant passed through the hall to the dining-room she gave a sudden start, hurriedly arranged the linen, and shut up the press. Then she went down to the shining kitchen, where the old cook, who had served as such in the house of Antje's father for twenty years, was standing before the dazzlingly white table busily setting out a number of dishes of cold meat and other appetizing viands.

"You need not go on with it, Classen," said the young wife. "Your master will not be at home this evening; he was obliged suddenly to go to Dresden."

The withered face under the white cap stared at her mistress with an expression of amazement, as if the latter had just announced that the world was coming to an end to-morrow, or something similar. Antje had turned away in the meantime, and was looking at the crackling flames on the hearth. She did not reply to the old woman's hurried question: "*To-day—Ant—to-day*, Frau Jussnitz? Was he obliged to go away *to-day*, of all days?"

"I shall have my tea as usual," said Antje.

"Very well, gracious Frau—yes—but——"

"And send the footman over to the Baroness, Classen, to say that I am very sorry we cannot carry out our little surprise, for Herr Jussnitz was obliged to go to Dresden, and I—with me alone—I have a headache—Frau von Erlach must give us the pleasure of her company another time. Do you understand, Classen? Or had I better write it down?"

She put her hand to her forehead and left the kitchen without waiting for an answer.

"Oh, yes, I understand," muttered the old woman, following her with her eyes. "I understand very well. Dearie me! And it is just four years to-day since they were made man and wife. I said so then, when I saw him looking about all round the church when he went to the altar with the child, that no good would ever come of it. Why would she have him at any price, when she might as well have had some one else as such a—such a——!"

She made a furious rattling among her dishes, and the unflattering epithet she applied to the husband of her idolized young mistress was swallowed up in the noise.

"He didn't have a penny to his name!" she went on, and then she went to the speaking-tube and ordered the footman to carry out her mistress's commands.

In the meantime the young wife had mounted the broad staircase and went into her own room with a bitter smile. He had never before failed to pay her

some little attention on this day ; was he so embittered that he must needs punish her so severely for what any one would consider she had a perfect right to do ? Why should *she* alone have no likes and dislikes ? Why should *she* alone not be allowed to say that such a person was agreeable to her and such a one disagreeable ? Could *she* help it if this Baroness was utterly antipathetic to her, though she seemed so charming to Leo ? To be sure, she might have kept silence, but Leo did not like that either.

She sighed and went to the window, through which the last pale rays of the setting sun were shining. The two great lindens, whose branches stood out sharply against the pale gold of the evening sky, had scarcely a leaf left on them. The wistful eyes could see far away into the distance through the branches ; she could see the towers of Dresden gleaming out in the blue twilight sky like a miniature picture in a rococo frame. She gazed at it till the bright tears came into her eyes and the round dome of the Frauenkirche swam before her in the rapidly deepening dusk. She passed her handkerchief over her eyes, but she remained standing motionless, thinking how, four years ago to-day at this very hour, she had been driving with him through the autumn woods, with such a deep happiness in her heart, looking forward to a wonderful future—as she thought !

If she could only be different, not so “stupid,” not so “narrow-minded,” as Leo had called her yesterday in his blaze of anger. But she felt so sure she would never learn that comfortable complai-

sance in conversation, never understand how people could manage to smile at things like—well, for instance, like that story which the Baroness had told yesterday in her fine, deep contralto voice, and with her droll manner, a story of a married couple who had been faithless to each other for years, and at last had agreed in the friendliest manner to get divorced, and who never met in the street now since their separation without exchanging a few friendly words and asking politely after each other's health. She had sat by listening with a shocked expression, and she could not comprehend how Leo and the Baroness could go into fits of laughter over the fact that this couple at Count L——'s last ball had even eaten a philopena together, and had related to each other all manner of queer things about their present manner of life.

Antje felt as if her ideal of married life were being dragged through the mire, and she had sat there grave and silent, finding it impossible to speak. This had provoked the Baroness into relating other stories, which grew more and more piquant, and at last Antje got up and left the room on the pretext of looking after her child. Upstairs she had sat down by the bed, and angry tears rushed to her eyes. Then Leo had come up, and, half-laughing, half-angry, had said : " You don't mean to stay up here ? It is very rude to leave your guest like this." And when he saw the two great tears on her lashes, he cried out : " Of course you can't come down like that ; but it is incredible, Antje, how ridiculous you make yourself, simply ridiculous ! "

" It is very possible," she replied.

Then he went away, and she followed him to the head of the stairs, but he did not look round. She could hear him say as he entered the dining-room : "I am sorry, Baroness ; my wife wishes to be excused. She has a bad headache." Then there was a drawling, compassionate "Ah !" and soon after the delicious, contagious laughter of the beautiful woman. Antje had stood in the hall till the Baroness went away ; it seemed to her as if the walls were of glass, as if she could see the young Baroness in the rocking-chair, her beautiful head leaning back against the velvet cushion, her cigarette between the red lips, and when she laughed, that row of brilliantly white teeth—Leo thought her mouth so wonderfully beautiful. When she was out of the house at last, a deep sigh seemed to lift a weight off Antje's heart that she had never felt before.

She had waited on the same spot for her husband, and she had put out her hand to him ; and when they were in their room she had said : "Don't be angry, Leo ; we were always very merry at home, very merry indeed, but we never could laugh at that sort of thing."

"Oh, I know your mother's sort of wit and humor very well, my dear," he replied with a yawn.

She was silenced, for she loved her mother, and Leo knew he could not hurt her more than by a slighting remark about the simple old lady who had spent her life in working and caring for her husband and child—notwithstanding her wealth. But during the long, sleepless night she had recalled how clev-

erly her mother had known how to manage her father and to put up with or overlook disagreeable things, which had perhaps been as little to her mother's taste as the free remarks of the Baroness were to hers. And she took herself seriously to task, telling herself that she had married an *artist*, and that it was wrong in her to offend a beautiful woman who must charm the eye of a painter, and that even if she listened to her foolish chatter she was in no danger of changing her principles; and she made up her mind that for Leo's sake she would put up with it for the future. He could not be painting her picture forever, and when the picture was finished these constant visits must come to an end, or at least become rarer. She had fallen asleep toward morning with the firm resolution to make it up with Leo by inviting the gay, handsome woman for that evening, and thus prepare for him at the same time a surprise for the anniversary of their wedding-day.

And now this delightful plan was all upset. Leo had apparently forgotten that there had ever been a seventeenth of October on which he had led to the altar a young and happy bride. He went straight to his studio after breakfast, without noticing the late roses which stood in a brown majolica vase on the table, and without casting a glance at his little daughter's white embroidered dress.

Antje Jussnitz felt the blood rush suddenly to her cheeks. Thank Heaven that she had not put on the pale pink morning-dress which she had secretly prepared for this day, because Leo had said once, lately: "My wife is always either a moth

or a bat ; she never wears anything but gray or black." And Antje wanted to please him ! She desired it as passionately as only a wife can who loves her husband. So she ordered for herself a colored morning-dress, and had put it on this morning, but when she looked in the glass she shrank before the image that was reflected there. She could not help seeing that she was beautiful, but she seemed to herself absolutely coquettish in the lace-trimmed dress with the long train and the little cap with pink ribbons. It reminded her of the morning toilet of an actress in some modern society piece. She felt as if she were trying to flirt with her husband, an action unworthy of a wife who knew herself to be beloved without all this finery. Thank Heaven, she had slipped back into her simple gray dress, otherwise she would have felt horribly ashamed if he had looked at her in surprise—and *to-day*, of all days, when he had forgotten what day it was.

She suddenly pressed her hand against her eyes, for she felt horribly hurt ; for the first time she had experienced an actual slight. She had been accustomed from the first to a certain want of consideration, for even as a lover he had never been at her feet. She did not know what it was to be an idolized wife, whose wishes her husband reads in her eyes and for whose slightest whim he will sacrifice time and money—nay, more than that, his own comfort ; whose smiles or tears will drive him to commit any folly. She knew nothing of this, and she did not miss it. She knew no married life except that of her father and

mother, in which the father was looked up to as the master, whom the wife waited upon and obeyed. At table he had the most comfortable place and all the daintiest morsels, the most comfortable corner on the sofa or in the carriage. "If you wish it, dear," were the words Antje was most accustomed to hear from her mother's lips; and the stately master of the house wrote in the album which he presented to his only daughter on the day of her confirmation, Goethe's words: "Let the woman learn betimes to serve according to her destiny."

Well, Leo evidently had different ideas; he did not understand her efforts to make the house comfortable for him. They had servants who made the tea, who got the supper, who kept the house in order. Antje did not know what there was for her to do, and she looked forward with joyful expectation to the birth of the child who was to fill up her life. When it was born in her mother's house she was able to do everything for it, but when they had moved into their own house it was different; then it seemed as if Antje only had a very costly doll, which she was allowed to play with sometimes on Sundays. Leo thought that it was quite the proper thing that the nurse and the *bonne* should take care of the child, and should bring it to its mother every day in the most charming toilet, like a young princess. At first Antje was quite inconsolable about it, but Leo had frowned upon all her entreaties, her mute, imploring looks, as utter nonsense. Now that the child was older and knew its mother, Antje found this state of things more endurable, though she still clenched her fists some-

times as she looked on and watched the strange hands bathing the little rosy limbs, wrapping them in soft, white linen, and heard strange voices singing her darling to sleep. . . .

The young wife suddenly brightened up and ran out of the room into the nursery. The stout nurse was just preparing the baby's bath. There was a smell of fine soap and warm water, the hanging-lamp was lighted and shed its rays on the bright carpet on the floor, which was covered with all manner of toys, and on which sat a fair-haired child of three years. The golden curls made a sort of halo round the delicate little face.

"Mousie!" cried the young wife, gayly, kneeling down impulsively before the little one; "little Mousie, your naughty mamma almost missed your bath!"

And she pressed her tearful eyes against the child's hair and kissed it passionately.

"Dear Christine, please, oh, please let me bathe my little Mousie to-day!" she cried, after a while.

The old woman shrugged her shoulders and muttered something.

"Mousie, whom will you have to bathe you?" asked Antje, as anxiously as if the happiness of her whole life rested on this decision.

"Mamma," said the child.

"As madame pleases," said Christine in reply. "I have a favor to ask of the gracious lady. My Minna was carried to the hospital to-day, and I am so anxious about her that I turn everything topsy-turvy. May I go down to the village this evening to inquire for her?"

“Why, to be sure, Christine ! Go at once and send Classen up to me.”

The old cook came with a frown on her face, and found Frau Antje happy and smiling as she bathed the child, who laughed and splashed in the water. But she was not deceived, for the long lashes were still wet with tears. She had nursed her Antje as a baby and had known her through all the years of her young life, as no one else but a mother could know her, and, going up to the tub, she said in a low voice : “It is not worth while to cry about it, gracious Frau ; with married people one day is like another, and it is all nonsense to mind anniversaries.”

“You are mistaken, my good Classen ; the baby has splashed the water in my eyes,” was the reply.

“Oh, yes, so I see,” murmured the old woman, “it is the water from the tub.” And she took up the hot-water bottle from the flannel wrapper.

And while Frau Antje dried the child, she said over her shoulder : “Herr Jussnitz had important business in Dresden, Classen, or he would gladly have stayed at home with Mousie and me—eh, Mousie ?”

“Oh, yes, to be sure ; important business, that was it, of course,” replied Frau Classen ; “and I am sorry for him that to-day, of all days, he—” The rest was unintelligible, for she was already out of the door and could not see how a few bright drops fell on the child’s little forehead, which this time, with the best will in the world, could not be accounted for by the water from the bath.

Antje remained in the nursery sitting by the crib

till the nurse came back. Then she went down into the dining-room, which, like the studio above it, extended the whole length of the house. It had been made to resemble an old German banqueting-hall, with the addition of a hundred articles of modern luxury which gave it an unusually comfortable look. The lamplight played about the silver and bronze vessels with which the enormous buffet was adorned ; the handsome chairs, covered with leather and adorned with the artist's coat-of-arms stamped in gold, stood in a row round the massive dining-table ; the ceiling and the panels on the walls were magnificently carved.

In front of the fireplace, near the crackling flames, stood a table set for two persons—for the servants knew that their master always liked a trifle, no matter how late he came in, and that Frau Antje usually sat by him while he ate. On it was a profusion of those dainty plates, saucers, shallow dishes, and little spoons, which are so useless and yet so charming. And in the centre stood the roses, giving an air of festivity to the cosey, inviting corner, as if saying : “ We are blooming for a happy pair.”

Antje took up the flowers and carried them to a table in a distant corner of the great room, and then she could think of nothing better to do than to go to the window and gaze out in the direction where a clear light on the horizon marked out the great city with its thousands of gas-lights. The tall antique clock in the room swung its pendulum untiringly, and marked off quarter after quarter. Antje knew she would have to stand here a long time waiting this evening, for the last train did not get in until

nearly twelve, and he would not come *before*. She knew very well the sort of meetings Leo was accustomed to attend and how long they lasted.

It had grown windy outside. Antje wondered if he had ordered the carriage to be sent to the station. And that carried her thoughts back to a letter she had received from her mother that day. She took it out of the key-basket that she had set down on the window-seat in front of her. She did not need to read it, for she knew every word of it by heart. At first came hearty good wishes for the anniversary of her wedding-day, with a hope that it might be with the daughter as it had been with the mother, who had loved her husband better every year, and had felt more and more how great a support and comfort he was to her. Then she recalled Antje's wedding-day, the pastor's sermon, the whimsical toast of the Bergrath, the torch-light procession of the workmen. Antje could almost see her mother's smile as she said : " Daughterje, when I was married it was merrier. We had music and dancing, and I had to waltz with all the guests, and they were not few. But, to be sure, wedding-journeys were unknown among us then."

Finally, there was a postscript : " You know, Antje, that I never like to meddle in your affairs, but I think I ought to tell you that I think your income will not admit of your setting up another carriage. You could both very well drive out in the same carriage, and when Leo needs it for himself you are reasonable enough to content yourself with a walk on such days. Do not be offended ; I mean it only for your good."

Antje's heart was very heavy. She thought the same, but Leo wished it, and she would not for all the world have said, as some women do who have brought a fortune to their husbands: "Be more economical with my money." What was hers was his, and he was the master.

What would her father have said to this luxury? she thought to herself; and when she recalled his grave, honest face she could not help feeling ashamed of the man who flung away this hard-earned gold in all manner of foolish extravagances. But Leo was an artist, different from other people, and she loved his light, careless laugh, loved his delight in beautiful things, his shining eyes. She did not grudge him anything—if he were only contented.

All at once she started up. There were steps on the ground outside, steps that she knew very well. All the blood rushed to her heart. She stood in the middle of the room, pale and trembling with joy.

"Leo!" she said softly, and her eyes were fixed on the man who entered hastily, his forehead moist as if from walking quickly, his hat in one hand and in the other a bunch of violets, such a bouquet as one buys in a shop—poor, drooping things which would so gladly hang down their heads if the wires would only suffer it.

Antje did not see the half-embarrassed, half-vexed expression in her husband's eyes, nor the faded condition of the flowers. She only felt that he had come back, that he had brought her some violets, that, after all, he had not quite forgotten the day.



CHAPTER III.

THAT afternoon Leo Jussnitz had reached the station just in time to jump into the first compartment he came to. The whistle of the trainmaster had already sounded the signal for starting, and the conductor pulled open a door and thrust him in. He had a first-class season ticket, but he found himself in a third-class carriage, and alone with a lady. At first he paid no attention to her; the air was horribly close and he went to the window to open it. But first he turned and, lifting his hat, said: "Will you allow me, Fräulein?"

The head, covered with a broad-brimmed felt hat, was raised a little.

"Oh, certainly," was the reply, in a clear voice.

Leo Jussnitz cast a hasty glance at the face beneath the shady hat, and saw two dark, almost unnaturally large eyes. The window was open half-way, and he sat down opposite her and looked at her. He saw a small mouth, bright red lips, and a delicately formed chin. The short nose and the two glowing eyes were shaded by the Rembrandt hat. Where, for Heaven's sake, had he seen this face before?

Her eyes fell beneath his gaze; the dark lashes which now rested on the pale cheek were wonderfully long. He felt sure he had seen this all before:

and suddenly there came before him the picture of his father's garden in the little city of the Mark, and a girl's face with great dark eyes was looking over the white-thorn hedge which separated their neighbor's garden from their own, and these eyes smiled at him and fascinated him, the gymnasiast of eighteen, till he found himself standing by the hedge with two slender hands clasped in his which stood out like snow against the dark green of the leaves. And the moon shone down upon them, and over in the castle park across the brook the nightingales were singing as he kissed the rosy lips.

But this could not be she, for sixteen years had passed since that period of his first love ; and this young creature before him was perhaps twenty years old. He looked at her again, and the memory of that time became so vivid that he felt quite bewildered.

"Tony von Zweidorf !" he said, half aloud.

A light laugh was the reply.

"You know me, then ?" inquired the girl. "But I am not Tony—ah, my dear Tony!—I am the youngest, Hilda."

"Hildegarde von Zweidorf—from Altwedel ?"

She nodded. "And you, sir ?"

He took off his hat and murmured his name.

"You used to know Tony ?" inquired the young girl, drawing up her slender figure as comfortably as possible into the hard corner of the wooden seat.

"Yes, Fräulein Hilda."

"But, then, you must have seen me too !"

"You were a child then, Fräulein von Zweidorf,

and will not be likely to remember the tall gymnasiast who used to go to dancing-school with Fräulein Tony."

"No, I do not. Have you been long away from Altwedel?"

"Very long. My father was sent from there to Silesia, and I . . . Are you still living in the little house on the 'Alta'?"

"Yes. It is such a queer little old house."

"Ah, I used to think it was delightful; we lived close by."

"There is a factory there now, an ugly red-brick building, with tall chimneys and a lot of factory girls, and a shrill bell which calls them to work."

"What a pity! And how are your parents?"

"Oh, thank you, papa is sometimes very poorly and he is always cross, and mamma"—she shrugged her shoulders—"of course suffers from it. It is always like that with us, sir."

"And Fräulein Tony? Is she as fond of dancing as ever?"

"Oh, Tony dance! Tony has grown very quiet and sad. Besides, it is always dull and stupid at our house," she replied with a sigh.

He made no answer; he looked at his opposite neighbor with a compassionate glance. What a picture of discomfort her words called up before him!

He knew every nook and corner of the little house that the family occupied, and he knew that in every corner were the traces of poverty, privation, and discontent. The tax-collector, Von Zweidorf, formerly an officer, had become acquainted with his wife, the little Mademoiselle Bergère, at a

comrade's house ; she came from French Switzerland, and filled the position of a *bonne*. Of course, he had not been in earnest at first in his pursuit of the beautiful girl, but the time came when as a man of honor he could not refuse to marry her. The commander of the regiment and his comrades had moved heaven and earth in trying to dissuade him from taking this step, but he was not to be turned from his resolve, and the hand that wrote his resignation did not tremble. He never told any one how hard it had been for him, but his troubled face, his crushed air, his shrinking shyness spoke loudly for him, and his wife suffered no less. His eldest daughter, Tony, a beautiful child, had at first brought some consolation to the heart of the unhappy man, but then other children had come, all girls, miserable girls ; and his cares grew day by day, and his daughters bloomed unseen and unsought and were embittered by their wretched life. They had their father's pride, too—they would not marry beneath them, the poor *Fräulein von Zweidorf*.

Leo Jussnitz was perfectly well aware of all this. And the youngest daughter was sitting before him, as lovely as her sister had been, gazing out toward the future with the same wistful eyes, and the same smile rested on the lovely little mouth. A beautiful vision of something he had not thought of for a long time rose before him—all the blissfulness of his early youth, with its high hopes and its foolish raptures of a first love.

"What are you going to do out in the wide world, Tony?"

He said it aloud, and was only recalled to himself by her hearty laugh.

"My name is Hildegarde, and I am going to my aunt who lives in Dresden. I want to be"—she drew herself up proudly—"to be a painter."

"A painter?" he inquired, with a smile. "Don't do it, Fräulein Hilda; it only brings disappointment and bitterness."

"But I have talent, sir."

"I do not doubt it for a moment, but still——"

"But you cannot know what my future will be!" she pouted.

"No, I am only judging from my own experience. When a man struggles for the rewards of destiny and almost succumbs, how can a weak, delicate girl hope to maintain herself? And the life of an artist is and always must be a thorny path."

"Ah," she laughed, "I will not let you frighten me, and I am not going to boast; but really, sir, I am very lucky. I must have been born under a lucky star. Just listen and see what will happen. I shall get a teacher, a good one, and then I shall be as industrious as I can, and then I shall get my first commission, perhaps half out of compassion, and then I shall do my very best—the picture is successful, it makes a sensation, and some fine morning I wake up and find myself famous! No, no," she continued, "I will not hear anything. I shall believe in my luck. I have heard croakings enough at home. I cannot do as my sisters have done, for I am different myself. Please, please," she concluded appealingly, clasping her beautifully shaped hands, from which she had drawn off the gloves, "do

not say anything, do not rob me of my trust in a brighter future than that I have so far had daily marked out for me."

Her pale face had flushed and her eyes sparkled with a wonderful fire.

"No," he replied, quite carried away by her enthusiasm, "no, I will not! May you be as successful in everything as you hope, and if I can be of use to you in any way—I am an artist myself and well known in artistic circles—you may count on me."

"There, didn't I tell you so?" she cried. "If *that* isn't luck! This very morning I was wondering how I should ever manage to penetrate to the studio of some celebrated artist—and here I find an old acquaintance of Tony's, and the doors fly open to me."

"It is to be hoped you will be satisfied with a lesser celebrity."

"You are an artist. Then you must be that Jussnitz who painted the 'Witch of the Brocken'! I saw the picture in an illustrated journal—didn't I? And in the original the witch had red hair, the most wonderful effect of color, the description said. Was that really you?" And she gazed at him with wide, astonished eyes.

"Yes, it was I," he said, in a low tone, returning her gaze.

They were silent for a while after this. "What beauty," he thought, "what *race*!" as he studied every line of the blushing, girlish face. The train slowed up, and the whistle of the locomotive indicated that they were approaching their destination.

"Where does your aunt live?" he inquired hastily.

"X—— Strasse, in the Friedrichstadt. Is it far from here?"

She was standing up, and, with her slender figure drawn to its full height, she was taking a handbag down from the rack overhead.

"Yes, a long way," he replied.

"Oh, what a pity!" she said.

He took the bag from her hand.

"Will any one come to meet you?"

"No. Auntie does not expect me till to-morrow, but I had no peace at home, and I didn't want to hear any more sighs and croakings. So I started off by myself this morning, without telling any one, and without saying good-by. I hate to say good-by."

He smiled.

"Give me your bag. I will carry it to the droschky for you."

"Thank you, but I am going to walk. I shall hire a porter."

"It is impossible, Fräulein von Zweidorf. You *must* have a carriage. I have something to do in the Friedrichstadt, too. Permit me to offer you a seat in my carriage—I——"

"No, I thank you," she said coldly, with the air of a princess.

"I entreat you to accept it," he urged, with genuine anxiety. "You have no idea how far it is; you really cannot wander about alone in Dresden in the night. Just consider: I am an old acquaintance of your family and I have a right to help you with my advice and assistance."

She gave a careless laugh.

"Yes, to be sure, we are neighbors, even though I really know nothing about you. But I will ask Tony to tell me all she knows. Well, then—if you will take me with you!"

Jussnitz called a droschky, and they drove away together. He sat quite silent at Hilda's side, while a curious feeling came over him in the presence of this stranger whom yet he seemed to know so well—she recalled the past so vividly to him.

What a Philistine these passing years had made of him—especially these last few! That time of youthful gayety, of enthusiasm, of ambition, and of mad pranks came back to him with an alluring charm.

Tony von Zweidorf! There was a sort of violet fragrance about the memory of this first love, and the gentle mood of that springtime of his life came over him with renewed force at this moment.

His companion was charmed with the River Elbe, with the many lights that were reflected in the dark water, with all the life and movement of the great city. She had a hundred questions to ask to which he had to find answers. When at length the streets grew quieter and the lights farther apart, she said in a disappointed tone: "I am afraid my aunt lives quite out of the world."

At this moment the carriage stopped at a small house of only two stories, which looked like a dwarf among the large buildings four and five stories high. There was a shop on the ground floor, which on a nearer view proved to be a grocer's, where vegetables, eggs, butter, cheese, and pickles were to be

had, and from which a by no means delightful odor streamed out when Jussnitz opened the door to inquire if Frau Secretary Berger lived in this house.

An enormously stout woman, who came out of a door so small that it was hard to comprehend how she had contrived to squeeze through, wiped her hands on her apron, and said :

"You are the niece of Frau Berger, I suppose? Eh, but I am sorry; she's gone out to a tea-party, and I don't know no more than a baby where it is she's gone to."

Hilda von Zweidorf laughed gayly.

"What am I to do till she comes back?" she cried. "Does my aunt generally get home very late?"

"Generally about eleven, Fräulein. You can stay here with me, if you like. Or just you wait a minute; sometimes Frau Berger puts the key under the mat before the door. I'll just slip up and see."

The benevolent giantess disappeared, and they could hear the stairs creaking beneath her weight as she toiled up, and then after a while came down again.

"I'm awful sorry, it ain't there; but if you want to wait here with me——"

"Perhaps you will look after the Fräulein's trunk," Jussnitz interrupted, an uncomfortable expression on his face. "And in the meantime you had better come with me, Fräulein von Zweidorf. You will want something to eat, at any rate, and a walk through the streets will be much better than waiting here in this horrible place."

This last he said in French, and she replied in the same language, with a faultless pronunciation :

"To be sure! The beginning of my future does not seem to be very brilliant, does it? This is my first disappointment. Auntie wrote about her pleasant house in the suburbs, and I pictured to myself an avenue of old trees and a garden in front. Oh, reality, how hateful thou art!"

She took the arm which he offered her, and walked away with him through the streets.

For one moment he thought of going to some fashionable restaurant, but then he turned toward a modest little place in the Friedrichstadt; it was quite empty. They sat down opposite each other at the neat little table, and at length were able to see each other distinctly in the bright gas-light.

Hilda's beauty lost nothing as she took off her hat and displayed her beautiful forehead. It was evident she was enjoying the situation.

"Please tell me something about yourself," she said, as she took a little cold meat. "Do you live in Dresden or out of the town?"

"Out of the town," he replied.

"Oh, I think I should prefer the city itself. Is your studio pretty? May I see it?"

Something like a shadow came over his face.

"Of course you may see it, and very often, I hope. Perhaps you will put up with me for a teacher till you find a better one?"

She put down her knife and fork and stretched out her hand to him across the table.

"How very kind you are! But I—paint landscapes!"

"So do I, occasionally. Besides, I only said till you find a better one. And then there is something

I should like—I should like to paint you, Fräulein Hilda. I may say Hilda for old acquaintance' sake ? ”

“ Of course ! And do you know that I remember you very distinctly now ? You used to be always lying in wait for Tony. I used to sit with my sisters on the doorstep, and you always looked up and bowed to Tony when she stood at the window.”

“ But you know,” he said, as if in excuse, “ my way led me past your house, and as her partner at dancing-school it was my duty to bow.”

“ Oh, yes, to be sure ! ” She laughed again. “ And you wish to paint me ? ” There was a scarcely suppressed tone of delight in her voice.

“ If you will allow it——”

“ Why not ? ”

“ But you must permit me to send the picture to the Exposition,” he added hastily.

She blushed with pleasure. “ Really ? ” she said.

“ Do you dislike it ? ”

“ No, indeed ! Why should I ? People can look at me in the street.”

“ Very well. I will come to your aunt's in a day or two.”

Hilda had finished her supper.

“ What shall we do now ? ” she inquired, as she stood up before the glass to put on her hat with its crushed ostrich feather, which, nevertheless, was very becoming to her.

“ We can go and look in at the shop windows, if you are not too tired.”

No, she was not too tired ; far from it ! She put on her black woollen gloves, from which a rosy

finger-tip peeped out here and there, and allowed Herr Jussnitz to help her on with her close-fitting jacket of cheap rough cloth, which, as it was new, did not look so badly, and took up her muff. It was of black catskin, or of colored rabbit. Then she declared herself ready.

They took the horse-car to the Post-platz, and then made their way through the crowd of people to the brilliantly lighted sidewalk. He never seemed tired of standing with her before the shop windows, each one of which put her into ecstasies of delight. She had never seen so large a city before. In front of a jeweller's window in which were flashing jewels of all colors, she became fairly speechless. She stood with wide-open eyes and parted lips. It seemed to Jussnitz as if a look of longing came over the lovely childish face.

"What would a thing like that cost?" she inquired at length, pointing to a small brooch of diamonds.

"Oh, a couple of thousand marks!" he replied.

"Two thousand marks? Oh, impossible!"

That was more than her father's whole income, on which a large family had to live.

"But tell me," she continued, as they walked on again, "how much does one get for a picture when one is celebrated?"

He smiled a little, her eyes looked so feverishly eager.

"When one is celebrated, he can get his own price, Fräulein Hilda."

"More than such a brooch costs, much more?" she inquired.

"Oh, yes !"

She gave a deep sigh.

"Now I must take you home," he began, after a long silence. He felt suddenly in a hurry.

She followed him without a word to the nearest droschky, and they drove back in silence to her aunt's little house.

"I will wait with the woman ; it is still all dark upstairs," said Hilda. "Thank you so much, Herr Jussnitz, and—please, please——"

He was standing with his hat in his hand, beside her, in front of the grocer's shop.

"Command me in anything, Fräulein Hilda."

"Please, please do not forget your promise, and come to us for the—for the lessons."

"I will come in three days."

He felt a grateful pressure of the little hand and she disappeared in the doorway, and Jussnitz could see through the window the stout woman conducting the beautiful girl into the room behind the shop.

The droschky was still waiting. "Drive to Z—— Strasse, No. 13," he called out ; "but go fast, if you want to earn a good *pour-boire*."

The driver grumbled a little, for Z—— Strasse was quite at the other end of the town. Then he gave a cut at his horse and they rattled away. In half an hour they got off the pavement, the scattered gas-lamps shed their light on the trees of a splendid old avenue, and a few villas appeared among the autumn foliage. The carriage stopped at the end of this street of gardens. Jussnitz jumped out and touched the electric bell on the wrought-iron gate, and as he waited for some one to come and open it

he tried to catch a glimpse of the house belonging to this garden. It must be very far down in the garden, for he could only see a confusion of leafless trees, of shrubs and green firs, among which the avenue was lost to sight. At length he perceived a lantern approaching, swung in the hand of an old woman.

"Who is there?" was the rather peevish question, asked from a distance.

"Is there a studio to let here?" said Jussnitz.

"Yes, but it can only be seen from nine o'clock in the morning till five in the afternoon."

"I don't want to see it. I want to rent it."

The old woman, who had only just opened the gate, held up the lantern and let it shine on the face of the stranger, who she thought must be slightly insane.

"Are there any other rooms belonging to it?" he inquired.

"A sitting-room, a bed-room, and another little room."

"Very good. Who else lives in the house?"

"No one, except Fräulein Brandt, who is here a few weeks in the summer sometimes."

"Does the villa belong to her?"

"Yes. But she has got another house in Strehlen, and she is old besides."

"You are the wife of the porter?"

"Yes, if you like to call me so, but I haven't any husband now."

"Do you attend to the service?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, then, I will take the studio, and in

three days I will send some people here to furnish it. Here is my card, and *this* is for you."

"Without coming in? But if you wish to see the rooms, sir—" The old woman was suddenly all politeness.

"I will look at them in three days," he replied. "Good-night."

"Good-evening, sir."

Jussnitz got into the droschky again and mentioned a well-known restaurant, while the old woman went away with her lantern, shaking her head vigorously, and was soon lost to sight in the lonely garden.

Jussnitz suddenly took off his hat; his face was hot and flushed. What was he about to do? He laughed at his own eagerness. The feverish desire to accomplish something, the old strong, creative force, had been reawakened in him by the sight of this beautiful girl with a power that he had not felt for a long time. He felt like a sick man who begins for the first time to have a hope of recovery.

He would paint her. He would make a sensation with this picture, and in order to do this he must free himself from all bondage. He *must* have this quiet studio, for how could he bring this girl home to Antje? It was impossible. Antje with her prudery, her narrow-mindedness—and this young creature, who reminded him of a superb wild horse of the steppes. It would be absurd. Besides, if he were ever going to amount to anything as a portrait painter, it was absolutely necessary that he should tear himself away from all his present surroundings, from the neighborhood of his

wife. He would not encounter her horrified eyes when a model entered the house, for she would never be able to understand ; he had long felt that, and therefore had long desired to take a studio.

Strangely enough, at this moment there stole over him a feeling of compassion for his wife. She ought to have married some good fellow, who beside her would have had nothing in his head but his counting-house. What could she do for him with her narrowness, inherited, and fostered by her training ? And he ? He felt the paralyzing burden of a woman who was not his intellectual equal more and more every day. An artist had no right to marry, at least not like this. No, he was doing the best thing possible when he took the studio, which a fellow artist had had who had now gone for a long sojourn at Sorrento.

"It is best so," he said half-aloud, as he entered with unclouded brow the fashionable restaurant which he was accustomed to frequent. Only four or five gentlemen greeted him, and they looked surprised at the sight of him.

"What the devil, Jussnitz, brings you here at nine o'clock at night ?" inquired an officer. "Do you know that Klöden and I had actually planned to take you by storm this evening ? Your old friend declared you were celebrating the anniversary of your wedding-day to-day. He heard it from Baroness Erlach, who was to take supper with you this evening."

"Yes, she told Fräulein von Bardeleben so this morning in my presence," said another, in confirmation.

Leo Jussnitz looked quite dismayed for a moment. Then he said, quickly recovering himself : " My wife has a very bad headache. I had some important business in town, and I am only going to drink a glass of beer and then I am going straight home. By the way," he continued, as he took up his beer-glass with its silver cover, " I shall hold you to your word, gentlemen ; come out to us to-morrow."

Oh, certainly, they would all come, but Jussnitz must stay a while longer, it was so infernally dull, as every one had gone to the wedding of little Countess Mellenthieu.

" Impossible ! " replied Jussnitz, and after having settled everything for the following day, he left the restaurant. In the first flower-shop which he found open, he bought a bunch of violets. As he was leaving the shop with the violets in his hand, he turned back and ordered a basket of flowers to be sent to Fräulein von Zweidorf, in X—— Strasse.

" Will you send your card with it ? " inquired the shop-woman.

" No," he replied, putting up his purse.

" But you have forgotten your violets, sir," the woman called after him.

He came back in some vexation, snatched up the forgotten flowers, and drove to the station. He just caught the train and jumped into a carriage.

" How you look, Jussnitz ; are you ill ? " asked a good-natured voice.

" Oh, is it you, Barrenberg ? No, not at all ill, only rather hurried. I wanted to catch this train."

“Have you been at the club? I suppose there was no one there——”

“Oh, yes.” And he mentioned the names of the gentlemen.

“My cousin is at your house this evening, Jussnitz.”

“Oh, I don’t think so, Barrenberg; the Baroness was there yesterday.”

“And she had an invitation from your wife for to-day. I am sure of it.”

Jussnitz laughed.

“All a mistake, my dear Barrenberg. She even refused me a sitting—on the score of headache.”

“The little liar! She wrote me not to come this afternoon, not till late this evening. We are going with the horses to the races at H—— to-morrow morning. Are you going?” asked the portly man, whom one would hardly believe had once been a cavalry officer.

“Perhaps,” replied Jussnitz.

“You had better come! The hussars have invited us to breakfast—and I will take you.”

“Thanks, if I possibly can,” he said carelessly. The cousin of the beautiful Baroness was a bore to him this evening. He was thinking of Antje and how he could excuse himself for having forgotten what day it was. He hoped she had not waited up for him.

“Have you a carriage to meet you, Barrenberg?” he inquired. He remembered that he had ordered his for a later train.

“I hope Irene will have sense enough to send me her coupé.”

“ Then will you give me a lift, Barrenberg ? ”

“ Of course, Jussnitz.”

The carriage was there, and Jussnitz got out near his house as they drove by. As he walked along by the garden wall, he saw a light in the dining-room, and angrily bit his lip. She was really sitting there waiting for him, and he knew precisely how she would receive him, without a word of reproach, with a pale face, with a quiet, indifferent manner, and in her eyes an expression sad as death.

He opened the hall-door angrily. There she stood in the middle of the room, glowing like a rose, and with a happy light in her eyes as she saw the bouquet in his hand.

She said, “ Leo ! ” in her usual hesitating fashion.

She was utterly different from the vision he had just had of her, but that did not make matters easier for him. “ How good of you, Leo,” she said as she took the flowers from his hand. She would gladly have said : “ You don’t know how glad I am you have come back,” but she dared not. He looked so tired and worn.

“ I hurried a good deal,” he said, as if he had read his wife’s thoughts. “ I wanted to catch the nine o’clock train.”

He poured himself out a wine-glass half full of rum, and sitting down at the table, he added : “ I had to go to town to-day, on account of—on account of the studio. I have taken it.”

Antje looked at him with startled eyes ; she knew nothing about it.

“ A studio in town ? ” she inquired, and her voice was husky.

"Yes ; you know I want to try portrait painting. Should I have my models come here ? That would not suit me."

"And you will go there every day, and——?"

"Oh, every day—I don't know about that. It may be that I shall be away for weeks, when I have an interesting work on hand. That will settle itself."

She drooped her head and was silent.

"Do order in something fit to eat, Antje. I can't satisfy my appetite with those little thin slices of bread and butter and sausage. Do you always spread such a splendid table when you are alone ? I shouldn't wonder if you followed your mother's example next and acquired a taste for gruel when I am away.—Franz !" —he turned to the servant—"bring me a bottle of Röderer." And turning to Antje with a yawn, he added : "We will drink to our wedding-day, child. Good Heavens, how tired I am ! The shop is out at Räcknitz, or whatever the hole is called."

"So far away ?" she inquired, absently, and laid the violets, which smelt like dried grass, down on the mantle-piece.

"Far ?" he said. "What do you call far ? It is an hour's drive, perhaps, from here."

Only an hour ! But this hour seemed to Antje like thousands of miles.



CHAPTER IV.

FRAU SECRETARY BERGER might be designated as the very pattern of a worthy burgher-woman, with all the virtues and failings of her class—good-natured, painfully neat, economical even to stinginess, inquisitive as a magpie with regard to the affairs of her good friends and neighbors, always ready to help others in misfortune, and pitilessly stern in all moral questions ; added to this, a rather choleric temperament, a wagging tongue, and a great liking for coffee- and tea-parties, in which one could always speak a word in season among those who were like-minded.

She lived on her very modest widow's pension and the income of a fortune of five thousand thalers which she had brought with her to her husband, and lived very comfortably according to her own ideas, even saving out something for the poor and sick, though she always stormed and scolded horribly whenever any one applied to her for help. Her relations in the little city of the Mark had always been a thorn in her side. She had always declared openly to her late husband that she couldn't bear such shiftless people as those Von Zweidorfs. Every time the announcement of the birth of a child reached her—and this had happened nine

times—she lifted up her voice and called heaven and earth to witness that she would never, never do anything for these wretched tempters of Providence ; that the relations in the Mark were very much mistaken if they thought that she, Frau Polly Berger, born a Trutz, would ever help to put bread into the mouths of all those superfluous children.

“I never, never will ! Do you hear, Berger ? ” she concluded.

Yes, Berger heard, but he made no remark. He knew very well that within the next twelve hours a little package, with every possible thing that could be needed for mother and child, and even with a few shining thalers, would be done up in a bundle of linen and sent off by post. And so he let her scold, the plump little woman with the saucy snub-nose, from which her glasses were always falling off.

Occasionally he would say : “Polly, you shouldn’t make foolish vows. You see, I sha’n’t live much longer, and when you have carried me out to the churchyard, it will be very lonely for you, for you won’t have any one to listen to you quietly when you scold, and so you will be sure to take one of the Zweidorf young ones home——”

“I ? To be my everlasting plague and torment ? ” cried Frau Polly. “Just consider a little, Berger, before you talk such nonsense, what an extra portion of folly those children must inherit from such parents. A girl like that would be just as likely as not to get up a love-affair under my very eyes, just as her mother did before her, or get into debt as her father does. And you want me to lend my coun-

tenance to a thing like that? Berger, I haven't deserved this of you."

And then she burst into sudden sobs. "I know she is your sister—but—you know, Berger, I am your wife, and, not to mention all the other things, you ought not to talk about dying. I shall die of grief if you leave me all alone in this wicked world."

But he did leave her alone one day, and at first Frau Polly was quite crushed by the loneliness which followed upon his death. It was fortunate that she had so many good friends, and was so fond of her tea-and coffee-parties. By degrees she grew accustomed to her widowhood, grew still more economical, interested herself more for strangers, and had plenty of time to observe her neighbors from her window. She did not die of grief.

Sometimes, it is true, she was overcome by a longing for a friendly voice—when it was bad weather, and she sat at home all alone in the twilight with her knitting—but as yet she had no thought of taking one of the Zweidorfs.

And now it had come to pass, after all, just as the late Berger had prophesied. A Zweidorf girl was to make her entry into the quiet widowed dwelling of the Frau Secretary Berger. When, one day, one of those weary, anxious letters had come from Herr von Zweidorf, she had made answer that he might send her, in Heaven's name, the girl who wanted to learn to paint. It is true that a few hours later she was scolding herself for it. Now her easy life was all over, and instead of buying *half* a pound of meat, as she now did, she must in future buy three-quarters. She hesitated as to whether

she should not write and stop her on the score of illness. Then the thought occurred to her, that this Hildegarde—"What a silly, high-flown name! Well, we will soon drive your aristocratic ideas out of your head, my dear"—that this Hildegarde could not paint the *whole* day long, and it would be a very good thing if she should do something practical in the mornings. In this way perhaps she might do without the charwoman, if not altogether, at least for some hours. "Well," she said to herself, comfortingly, "I will try it." She would not confess even to herself that her compassion was greater than all other considerations.

The good Polly! When she came home late that evening from her tea-party, a slender, girlish figure was standing in the dark hall beside the stout grocery woman. "Like a young countess," thought Frau Polly, at the first glance. And as this young countess developed into the niece she had not expected till the next day, Frau Polly, who had just been impressing the whole tea-party with her weighty speeches, was quite abashed.

She had never thought of *that*! She even excused herself, in her first confusion, for not being at home; she made excuses for the bedroom, which was at the back, was hardly big enough to hold the little bed, and was absolutely stifling with the smell of cheese from the store-room of the little shop, which was directly beneath.

But Hilda von Zweidorf said she was tired, very tired, and was sure she should sleep beautifully; and, as she spoke, her eyes shone so, and seemed to look so indifferently at the more than simple furni-

ture, far, far away into some vague distance, that Aunt Polly came to the conclusion that she would have as an inmate one of those dreamy, enthusiastic, artistic natures that hardly know if they have warm water set before them instead of coffee. In fact, Hilda declined everything that was offered her, saying she was not hungry. But, on the other hand, she was so heartily grateful for the refuge she had found with her dear Aunt Polly, and asked with such an expression of touching sympathy for her aunt's health, that the old lady, when the girl was finally shut up in her room, did not know whether to be glad or sorry; only one thing was clear to her, and that was that Hilda would neither cook nor sew nor help to clean up the house.

Neither Aunt Polly nor Hilda slept much that night. The young girl buried her glowing face in the pillows and dreamed of a wonderful future. The first step was taken. Hilda von Zweidorf had absolute faith in her success in life; she had had a hard struggle to gain her father's consent to her becoming an artist, and she had carried out this struggle with a determination that no discouragements could overcome. It was impossible for her to believe that she, Hilda von Zweidorf, could live on till all her bloom had faded, as her sister Tony had done, and as her other sisters seemed in a fair way to do. She had called them "poor-spirited creatures" over and over again, and had tossed back her head when she saw the four sisters who were still at home assembling in the little room every day as the clock struck eight, to sew or to knit. "You are not human beings; you are mere ma-

chines!" she would cry out. "Do try something else. Go out into the world; good fortune will never come here to this wretched house; we must go and look for it!"

But the others thought Hilda was too extravagant in her ideas; they were far better off here at home than Barbie and Lottie in their deaconess house, where they were always in the midst of sickness, misery, and death. Well, Hilda had never sewed; she earned her money by painting on silk and leather. She would sit out in the meadow half the day, painting water-color pictures of the old castle on the other side of the river, the oak-grove which was marked out against the distant horizon, or a peasant's hut with a Wendish gable roof half hidden beneath huge linden-trees. Then, when it was so lonely all around her, when the golden sunlight rested on the meadows, the noon-day bells sounded from afar, and the bees hummed in the grass, her dark eyes would gaze dreamily out into the distance. She no longer saw what lay before her, she only saw a bright, shimmering chaos, very vague, far from clear, but she knew it was happiness, and happiness was fame and riches; and then—he——

"He" must be something very aristocratic and distinguished. She would not be always kept down in this miserable poverty; she would mount into the more rarefied atmosphere of the higher circles. And why should she not? Hilda knew she was talented and—beautiful. If she could only get away from this wretched place, where, in the absence of any real men, the gymnasiasts had dress coats made for themselves and put on all the airs of grown-up men.

Hilda had never been to a ball in Altwedel, and when her sisters washed and ironed their white dresses in the sweat of their brows, and turned their sashes on the other side, she would shrug her shoulders and say: "*Who* is there to see you?" And while the others were dancing she was lying at home in bed with wide-open eyes, thinking: "How shall I manage to get out of this place? How shall I begin to see life, *real* life?"

Hilda did not get on very well with her mother; the shy, crushed air of the pale woman always irritated her. Accustomed to receive only the very smallest share of all that goes to make up life, the humble woman had got into the habit of using a word which she unconsciously wove into all her remarks: "Children, shall we have a 'bit' of broth to-day?" Or, "We will go to church for a 'bit' to-day." "Papa has a 'bit' of a headache." "I have bought a 'bit' of stuff for a dress for Gretchen." "Hilda, let us have a 'bit' of fresh air in the room."

"Good heavens, mamma, why should we have a 'bit'? Fresh air doesn't cost anything, at any rate; you can have as much of it as you like," cried Hilda.

"Oh, child, don't be so cross. I didn't mean anything by it; I was only a 'bit' absent-minded."

Ah! this life that consisted entirely of "bits" had been frightful for Hilda. Then at last she had prevailed upon her father to write to her aunt in Dresden, and the bored, weary man had yielded for the sake of peace, as he said; and, contrary to his expectations, a reply in the affirmative had come

from Aunt Polly. The letter had come upon the household like a bomb.

Frau von Zweidorf had fitted out her child a "bit," as well as she could. The sisters good-naturedly gave whatever they could spare themselves to help out Hilda's wardrobe, for Hilda had a decided inclination for adorning and improving her simple costumes, especially her hats. She accepted without a pang the scraggy ostrich feather that was the pride of Tony's heart, and fastened it into her broad-brimmed Rembrandt hat after her mother had curled it a little "bit." In any case, according to Hilda's views, Tony had passed the age when one cares to dress—she was thirty-two. The last day before her departure, the excited, impatient girl was quite upset. She could not bear any of her sisters' good advice, still less their teasing. But her father, with a sad face, laid down a twenty-mark piece on his work-table and said: "I would gladly give you more, dear child, but I have no more now."

Hilda was almost touched, and she did not wish to feel like that; soft-hearted people seldom accomplish anything. And she couldn't bear it at all when her mother said: "Ah, Hilda, if you were only to have a 'bit' of good luck!" What should she do with a "bit" of good luck? She wanted a great deal, all she could get! What was the use of hanging back?

She made short work of it finally; she took her departure a day earlier. She made her preparations quite secretly for leaving the house at five o'clock in the morning. It was easy enough for her to get away, for she slept alone in an attic room.

Fritz, a little neighbor, carried her bag to the station ; she had given it to him the night before over the hedge. The trunk could be sent after her. She wrote a few lines of farewell on a piece of paper, laid it on the kitchen table, and stole away. She lingered a moment in front of her parents' door ; then she hurried down-stairs all the faster. It almost seemed as if she could hear her mother saying: "Hilda, isn't it a little bit hard for you to leave us?" No, it was not hard for her, for before her was the world, the whole wide world !

It was the first journey Hilda von Zweidorf had ever undertaken. It would have made another girl anxious and bewildered, but Hilda was as cool and collected as if she had been an American who had done nothing but travel from her childhood up. There was a singing and ringing in her ears ; even the very rolling of the wheels made a melody for her, for she was travelling toward her happiness !

How fortunate it was that she had not waited another day ! She sat up in bed and pressed her hands against her throbbing temples. Was she really to find everything at the very first step she had taken out into the world ?

He had looked at her so strangely, with such unfeigned admiration. She recalled his appearance ; he was a handsome man and very aristocratic looking. Hilda only knew such men from hearsay, but he came up to the ideal she had formed of them. And he was an artist besides, his name was already known. And he had such good taste ! What a seductive figure that "Witch of the Brocken" was which Hilda had seen !

With her excitable fancy, with her young heart thirsting for happiness, with the determined character which knew no half-way measures, she had fully determined by the time morning had dawned that she had found "him," that she loved him and was beloved by him, and that in the next few days some wonderful fairy miracle would bring her the fulfilment of all her wishes. She pictured it all to the minutest details; she fancied herself walking through the streets of her native town on his arm—they were on their way to Italy—and she heard the people say: "That is Hilda von Zweidorf, who married the celebrated Jussnitz."

With burning cheeks and sparkling eyes she went into the sitting-room to drink her coffee with Aunt Polly. She replied absently to a great number of curious questions, gazed vacantly at the very humble furniture of good Frau Berger, who in a bright calico night-cap, with a jacket to match, was doing the honors, and then went and sat down by the window.

Aunt Polly dusted the room, occasionally casting a wrathful, questioning look at the young girl, who with carelessly folded hands sat there, motionless, looking out into the street. It was an ugly street, with houses that looked like barracks; her aunt's house—one of the few old buildings which had not yet fallen a sacrifice to the wide-spread love of building—stood there like a dwarf among the other giant buildings packed to the roof with tenants. On the sidewalk, which a thick autumn mist had made damp and slippery, people were hurrying to and fro—not the finer sort who had charmed Hilda's

eyes the day before, but people who were going with an air of haste and business to their work or on some special errand. The horse-cars jingled by, coal-carts rumbled over the pavements, and then there came a funeral—it was all so ugly in the gray tints of an October mist.

Aunt Polly left the room, but Hilda did not perceive it ; she was still gazing out into the street, waiting for something. Presently she saw her aunt crossing the street in her dark, ample waterproof, her umbrella in her hand. She waddled rather clumsily over the pavement, and before she disappeared in the opposite butcher's shop she came into collision with a young fellow. Hilda saw her turn and call something after him, nodding angrily the while, but he took no notice but came straight across to the little house. Hilda's heart stopped beating for a moment ; he carried a wonderful basket of roses in his hand, and she felt with unmistakable certainty that those roses were for her. She got up and went out into the hall. Yes, the bell was really ringing ; the boy came up the stairs and asked for Fräulein Hildegarde von Zweidorf.

"I am Fräulein von Zweidorf," she said. "From whom ?"

"I do not know," replied the messenger, giving the basket into the young girl's hand. He lingered a little, waiting for his fee, and looking at the door behind which Hilda had disappeared ; then he went down-stairs again, whistling. But the young girl within the room was hiding her face in the flowers and inhaling their fragrance, which quite intoxicated her.

Aunt Polly found her walking up and down the room with quivering limbs and burning cheeks, the roses still in her hand.

"What is all this?" asked the old lady, who was just going to put her veal in to roast. "Where did you get the flowers?"

The words were spoken in a very suspicious tone.

"I don't know, aunt; they were just left here for me."

"That is curious! That thing must have cost twenty marks at least, at this time of the year. Just you listen to me, child"—and the stout little aunt stood before the slender niece with uplifted finger and wrathful eyes—"all this stuff of anonymous bouquets and that sort of thing won't go down with me, do you understand? You are living with a respectable woman, and you will behave like a respectable girl, or the door will be open to you—there!"

Every drop of blood had fled from the girl's face, and the basket with the flowers dropped from her limp hand.

"Aunt," she gasped, "what are you saying? What do you mean?"

"Oh, don't fly into a passion. I am only telling you what you have got to do," was the reply, and Frau Polly peeled an onion over the frying-pan.

"I don't know who the flowers came from," said Hilda, defending herself. "I declare to you, aunt, that I only suppose they must have come from Herr Jussnitz, the artist, the man who came here with me yesterday. I knew him before, he used to

live next door to us, and he is going to give me lessons."

"Well, well, we shall see about that. For the present you can do something to occupy yourself, so you need not be sitting round thinking your silly thoughts. The stockings that came back from the last wash are not darned yet, and the yarn is there on the work-table."

"I—aunt—I have a headache, and I must go out into the air. I didn't come here to darn stockings either; I want to educate myself for an artist. You will surely let me visit the galleries?"

Aunt Polly was still standing speechless, with the onion in her hand, when her insulted niece shut the hall-door behind her, and hurried down the street, crying with vexation at the treatment she had undergone.

The indignant girl followed the horse-car track, and at length found herself in the handsomer part of the town. She asked some one to tell her where the picture gallery was, and was told to turn to the right. She was forced to wait on the corner of the street, there was such a confusion of carriages and foot-passengers. Among a couple of horse-cars, several carts, and various droschkies, an elegant landau was slowly making its way. Hilda at first only saw the magnificent black horses, which, with their bits flecked with foam, were tossing their heads with impatience at their delay. Then she started. Wasn't that "he"? The occupant of the carriage had his head turned toward his neighbor, a young, light-haired woman, whose delicate oval face was framed in a simple steel-blue capote. It

must be he; two men could not look so much alike!

Hilda pushed her way through the crowd in order to get a better view, but the street had cleared just then and the carriage dashed on. Hilda walked on mechanically, still looking after it. A vague, tormenting fear had seized upon her. The carriage soon disappeared from her sight, and she wandered on, entirely occupied with her thoughts.

But it *could* not be he! He had spoken to her yesterday of trials and struggles in which he had been almost overcome, and that man in the carriage did not look like an artist who had had many privations to endure. And Hilda laughed at her own folly. That man in the carriage, with his wife beside him, was no doubt some rich manufacturer. She thought of her roses at home. A man who had a beautiful woman like that beside him did not send flowers to other people in that secret manner. She gradually grew calmer, and made up her mind that in future she would be more reasonable, and would do her best to get on with Aunt Polly, for she was quite dependent on her at present. She asked the way to X—— Strasse, and finally reached home after a long walk.

Aunt Polly was lying on the sofa with her apron over her face, taking her afternoon nap. The room smelt of soup and *nudels*; a dish was being kept warm, for Hilda no doubt, as the table-cloth was still on the table and her plate and knife and fork were awaiting her. The old lady did not wake; Hilda silently ate her dinner, and after she had finished

cleared the table as silently. She had never **done** this at home. She had been petted and spoiled by them all, and had been looked up to by them as the "talented one." Then she softly opened a window, and sat down to try and darn the stockings.

She was not very successful, for she was quite inexperienced, and the roses which stood in front of her confused her so that she took blue yarn for black stockings. But the old lady, who had wakened unobserved by Hilda, when she saw the young girl so busily at work by the window, decided to overlook the past. She lay quite still, looking at the picture before her, and thought to herself that after all it was very pleasant to have such a fresh young creature in the house. She would try as far as it lay in her power to make her sensible and to get all those silly ideas out of her head which the Zweidorf training had put there. And if Hilda got on with her—well, then there might be some reason for making a will.

"Look here, Hilda," she cried, suddenly sitting up, "we will try it again if you like. Come here and give me your hand."

And Hilda crossed the room and put her hand into her aunt's fat one.

"But you mustn't talk any more nonsense like that of this morning."

"I know very well what I am about, and I know the world, if I am young," remarked Hilda.

Aunt Polly laughed a little. "You little goose!" she said. But she was silenced by the fiery glance of this young creature.

"And," continued Hilda, "I must beg of you not

to forget that I am a Zweidorf and that our motto is, 'Honor above all ! ' "

Aunt Polly turned quite red. Hilda was standing before her with the majestic air of a young princess. Aunt Polly suddenly discovered that she had found her master. She felt quite crestfallen as she went into her little dark kitchen, and stood there like a stranger in her own four walls.

There would be a pretty kettle of fish if this girl was to be forever flourishing her motto and crest ! At length, with a deep sigh, she went down-stairs to the shop and sent the grocery-woman's little girl for the charwoman. It was no use to try and do without her. Aunt Polly couldn't get up the courage to set her high-born niece to washing the dishes. She couldn't even imagine now how she had ever come to think of it. When she came back she found Hilda in the little spare-room, trying to arrange a sort of easel by the window with the help of a big portfolio.

"It is no use," said the girl ; "it is too dark."

And Aunt Polly inquired if Hilda wouldn't paint in the best parlor. As soon as she had said it she bit her lip and wondered what had made her. And yet she seemed to be impelled to open the best room and look on in silence as Hilda began eagerly to arrange her things. She nodded resignedly as Hilda removed half a dozen china flower-pots containing artificial roses and camellias from the window-seat, with the simple inquiry : "May I, aunt ?"

"Oh, thank you so much, aunt," said the girl, when this was done. "I will take the very best care of your nice room."

Inwardly she shuddered at the furnishing of this

room, especially at the carpet, which was bright blue with white roses strewed over it. She was also very much disturbed by the horrible portraits of her aunt and her late husband. But this was only for a little while; some day she would neither have to look at the blue carpet or those wretched portraits. She took out a water-color picture of her father's house, behind which was a rude old stone tower and some tall lindens, and while she was getting her color-tubes and brushes out of her paint-box she told her aunt all manner of things about her home. Then she began to finish her sketch.

"It looks so washy," said Aunt Polly, "and the paper is so coarse. *Must* you have it like that?"

"Yes," replied her niece, shortly; and Aunt Polly nodded and sat down with a sigh in the opposite window, took out her knitting-work, and looked at the houses across the way. She comforted herself with thinking that it was really very interesting to have a niece who painted.

But Hilda could not paint forever, and it seemed as if the hours would never pass. How long a day could be—how horribly long! She did not sleep at night, she was always thinking of the promised visit. "I shall come in three days," he had said. Would he keep his word?

The third day came at last. Hilda sat down to her work at an early hour, but her colors dried on her palette, for she was continually gazing out into the street. When it was too late to expect a visit that morning, she fell into her old state of feverish unrest; she could not eat a morsel, and walked up and down Aunt Polly's best room like a chained

lioness. If he should not keep his promise, what would become of her? She did not remember now that she had come here to make her way *alone*; she felt as if her bark would suffer shipwreck if he stayed away.

And he did *not* come. It grew dark; Hilda could no longer distinguish anything in the street. She went out to the top of the staircase and listened for the door-bell. Once she thought it must be that some one was coming—her heart beat rapidly and her limbs shook, but it was only the post-man who brought her a letter from home. She put it in her pocket and waited. He did not come.

By evening she was shivering all over, and then she was burning hot. Aunt Polly saw that the girl could scarcely sit up; there were dark shadows under her eyes and her face seemed quite changed.

"For Heaven's sake, go to bed, child. I hope you won't be sick!"

And she took the girl herself into her little room.

"Go to sleep," she said; "you want some fresh air. Why haven't you been out all this time? It can't be good for you to be painting all the time."

"Yes, I am tired," gasped the girl. And when the little old lady had gone away she hid her head in the pillows and groaned like one wounded unto death. The man had simply been making sport of her, or he had forgotten her long ago, while she had been thinking of nothing but him. She clinched her fists in anger and wondered how she could revenge herself if she should ever meet him again. At this moment she could very well comprehend that there were women who were

capable of stabbing a man who had been unfaithful to them. She did not sleep that night, and the next morning she was hardly strong enough to get up, but the hope that he might still come that day gave her courage.

She read her letter from home to-day. It was from her mother. The lines were overflowing with motherly tenderness and anxiety, but there was a little touch of wounded feeling, too.

"When I found your parting note on the kitchen table, Hilda, I could not keep back my tears," she wrote. "I thought if you had only cared for your mother the 'least little bit,' you would not have gone away without saying good-by. May God grant that all your golden dreams may come true, dear child, and may you be spared all disappointments!"

Tears rushed to Hilda's eyes, but she brushed them angrily away. If her mother could only know what a disappointment her "dear child" had already encountered! But she must never know that, neither she nor any one else in the world! And Hilda sat down again to her painting and looked out into the street. Her aunt insisted upon her going out, but she refused obstinately. She was waiting. And when the twilight came on again, she suddenly started up from her chair, and then sank helplessly back—a man's voice in the hall was asking for Fräulein von Zweidorf.

She had not heard the bell, she had not seen him coming; but here he was, Aunt Polly was bringing him in. The old lady hurried off to get the lamp, and when she came back she found him

standing before Hilda, who was sitting in her chair pale as death.

Leo Jussnitz was very civil to Aunt Polly. He told her about his former friendly relations with the Zweidorf family ; how glad he was to be able to be of some use to Fräulein Hilda, here, whom he had known when she was a little girl ; how pleased he was to find her here under the protection of so kind an aunt ; and how he had come to make arrangements for giving her lessons.

Aunt Polly kept her eyes on his right hand, but there was no sign of a wedding-ring to be seen beneath his faultlessly fitting glove. Hilda did not speak at first, and it was not until he turned to her directly and asked if it would suit her to begin her lessons the next day, and if she could give him her first sitting the day after, that the color began to come back into her face.

"Yes," she said, shortly ; and she added : " In what dress will you paint me ? "

" In what could I paint you but a Spanish mantilla ? " he said, looking at her with undisguised admiration. " But you must look as you do to-day, so pale and so angry and— " So beautiful, he was going to say, but he choked back the last words.

She made no reply. Aunt Polly was also silent and dared not make any remark.

" Where is your studio ? " inquired Hilda, at length.

He mentioned the street.

" Good Heavens," cried Aunt Polly, " that is at the end of the world ! And do you mean to walk there every day ? "

" To be sure, aunt ! And in your company the

way will not seem long," replied Hilda, plucking at the crochet lace which was spread over the arm of the chair.

Jussnitz could not suppress a smile, for Aunt Polly looked anything but pleased at the prospect before her. The good woman did not know whether to laugh or be angry at the claims made upon her. How could she—every day—every day? Ah, her time, her beautiful leisure time!

"But just consider, child," she began, "I beg of you!"

"Dear aunt," replied Hilda, with that majestic air that had imposed silence on Frau Berger three days before—"dear aunt, you must consider that you have laid upon yourself the heavy burden of acting as chaperon to your young niece, and that nothing is left for you but to bear this burden as patiently as may be."

Aunt Polly's face did not brighten at all at this speech; she only flushed crimson with anger. This was the punishment for her suspicion. Hildegard knew very well how to revenge herself.

"Every day?" she stammered, helplessly.

"Yes," replied Hilda, shortly.

"I want to have the picture ready for the Berlin Exhibition," added Jussnitz.

"You are to be displayed at the Exhibition? What would your father say to that?"

Aunt Polly clutched at the first straw to save herself.

"Aunt, don't, please; you do not understand," cried the young girl, excitedly, turning toward the little woman, with her eyes flashing.

Jussnitz thought it best to go. Aunt Polly tripped out to light the hall lamp.

"Why did you not come yesterday?" asked Hilda, in a low tone, but with a good deal of impetuosity.

He smiled; he liked her in her angry excitement.

"I was detained by important business, just as I was starting."

"Do you know what *waiting* means?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. With you it means——"

"Suffering torture!" interrupted Hilda, abruptly.

He knew she was speaking the truth; her feverish eyes gave evidence of it.

"Good-by, Herr Jussnitz, and thank you for the flowers," she added.

He smiled again. "And what if I did not deserve your thanks?" he said.

She was taken aback for a moment; then she, too, smiled. Her still gloomy face looked indescribably lovely.

"By Jove, I don't know whether I had not better paint you with smiling lips, after all!" he cried. And when she gave him her hand he pressed it to his lips and murmured: "*Auf wiedersehen!*"

Aunt Polly lighted the guest down-stairs. When she came back to remonstrate with her niece, the latter had left the room and fled to her own chamber. There she yielded to her overstrained nerves and cried, cried as if her heart would break.

Aunt Polly stood outside and demanded to be let in, in vain; at last she went back to the parlor, shaking her head. Good Heavens! What would come of it? He was handsome and distinguished,

and—one could never tell—in love affairs the unlikeliest things sometimes happened. Well, she shouldn't grudge it to the Zweidorfs. "Ah, Polly, Polly," she said, half-aloud, "you have got yourself into a pretty mess with your silly good-nature. Well, it is to be hoped the affair will soon come to a good end!"





CHAPTER V.

AN open carriage coming from Dresden dashed by on the highway at full speed. It was a dull December day, and the snow was coming down in large flakes. The two gentlemen who sat in the carriage wrapped in furs looked like snow-men, so thickly were the white stars scattered over their coats. Herr Jussnitz had just met at the station his friend Wolf Maiberg, who had come direct from Hamburg. Only a few days before he had arrived there on the steamer from Rio de Janeiro, and had come to spend Christmas with his friend Jussnitz.

Leo Jussnitz looked cross. "You will certainly take cold, Wolf," he grumbled. "What an idea, to want to drive in an open carriage!"

"If you are afraid of freezing, then have the carriage shut up," was the reply. "As for me, it is a perfect delight to be able to breathe snowy air—German snowy air, once more, Leo."

And the man's broad breast expanded, he drew in such a long, full breath. A shadow passed over his handsome, strong face, the sunburned color of which contrasted strangely with the light full beard and the clear, gray-blue eyes, as Jussnitz actually gave orders to have the carriage closed.

"It is a pity," he said; "this wintry landscape, the white roofs of the villas in their snowy gardens

make such a pretty picture. You can't imagine, Leo, how delighted I was when I saw the first flakes from the window of the train to-day. Such a feeling of having got home came over me so powerfully that I——"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, Wolf, you will see plenty of snow now, and I have no desire to get a cold in my head."

Dr. Maiberg, struck by the irritated tone, looked penetratingly at his friend, and noticed his sharpened features, pale face, and dull eyes.

"Are you not well, Leo?" he asked, anxiously.

"Oh, don't torment me with questions like that, Wolf. I can't possibly look as I did eight years ago."

"Of course not, any more than I do—the years will write their lines on our faces. But still you might look well, and that is not the case. You look nervous."

"My dear Wolf, you are on the lookout for a patient," said Jussnitz, with an angry laugh.

"Heaven forbid! On the contrary, I am glad for once not to hear any complaints, but I am sorry not to find you as well as I had hoped."

"I thought my last letter might have——" began Jussnitz.

"Yes, to be sure—that letter. I could see from that that you were not quite up to the mark. It was a jumble of complaints and self-congratulations, of good and bad—you were not at your best when you wrote it, Leo. But just look, there is a wagon full of Christmas trees," said Maiberg, suddenly interrupting himself and pointing with a smile to the cart

which drove by as fast as its heavy burden would allow, filling the air with a resinous odor of fir-trees.

"They are all going to Santa Claus," said Jussnitz. "But don't get excited, Wolf; you shall have a Christmas tree; only, for Heaven's sake, don't let us be sentimental."

"I? I haven't the slightest leaning in that direction, Leo. I was only trying to avoid a sentimental conversation that seemed to have been burning on your tongue ever since we met. You are aching to free your mind to me, old fellow, and I will not give you a chance to do it. I would rather see and judge for myself. I am convinced that it is not half so bad as you try to make out. You always used to exaggerate."

"You are still of the opinion, then, that only that man is happy who believes himself to be so?"

"Quite right, that is still my opinion; for it is not the circumstance itself, but only the way we take it, that makes all our trouble. Who is it that has said the same thing? Well, no matter, it is true, at all events."

"My mother-in-law is on a visit to us now," said Jussnitz, laconically.

The other laughed heartily. "Ah, there are vineyards, Leo! Have you anything so delightful on your place?"

"Yes, there are vineyards belonging to Sibyllenburg," replied Jussnitz.

"Then you will offer me a draught of wine from your own press at the gate of your castle, Leo?"

"Unfortunately, I do not make my own wine. I have let the vineyard—it is too heavy a wine for me.

It is a pity, Wolf, for you would no doubt take the Sibyllenburg wine for genuine Rudesheimer or Johannisberger, thanks to your gift for seeing, tasting, and feeling things as you expect to find them."

"Now you seem to be recovering, Leo, so tell me about your painting. Have you finished your picture of the beautiful Baroness?"

"No, I have had something more important on hand, and she has been away for a long time, too."

"More important?" inquired Wolf Maiberg, stooping to pick up a small packet that Jussnitz had pulled out of his pocket as he took out his handkerchief. The carelessly folded paper displayed a pale blue plush *étui*, which had sprung open and revealed a glittering object, giving out all the colors of the rainbow. The young doctor opened the case to its full extent.

"You see, Leo, curiosity is still my great weakness," he said with a smile, as he examined the ornament. It was a very small brooch in the shape of a clover-leaf, but the three stones which composed it were exceedingly costly—a ruby, a diamond, and a sapphire. Nevertheless, the little pin had an air of simplicity; none but a connoisseur would have understood its real value.

"Very pretty, Leo," said Maiberg. "Is that your wife's taste? A little brooch like that looks to me more suited to a young girl."

Jussnitz took the *étui* and put it back in his pocket. "It is the fashion just now, that sort of thing," he said. "Besides, you know this is Christmas-time."

"Yes, it is charming, this time, with all its little

mysteries. You are a lucky fellow to be able to make such presents, and especially when you know you will attain your object of giving pleasure."

Leo Jussnitz muttered something unintelligible. His friend paid no attention to it; his face, which had been so cheerful before, had now grown grave.

"I wanted to make a present of just such shining stones once," continued Maiberg. "It was two years ago. I had been saving up for it for months, and it gave me great pleasure when I pictured to myself how a certain pair of dark eyes would shine as they looked at the sparkling stones. I was just putting the *etui* in a bouquet of pomegranate blossoms, to send it to its destination, when the postman came and brought me a letter—and I did not send off the brooch. The person for whom it was intended wrote to me that she thought it would be better for her *not* to join her fate to mine, and that in accordance with her parents' wishes she had engaged herself to the owner of a hacienda which was one of the largest and richest in all Brazil. I threw the pomegranate blossoms out of the window and locked up the brooch in my writing-desk. How could I ever have imagined that a woman would share my toilsome lot? It is quite another thing when one has a husband who can put carriages, villas, and yachts at one's disposal."

"You never wrote me that you were engaged, Wolf," said Leo. "Why did you not comfort yourself with some one else? Good Heavens, there must be plenty of girls, and rich girls too, even in that part of the world."

"I loved her."

"And do you love her still?"

"I have got over it now, Leo, and I have come here to look for a wife, a good woman, a *German* woman. Do you know—such a woman as my mother was—can you remember her? Always pleasant, kindly, and with a sound understanding; for anything more, Leo, is superfluous in a woman who is to be always with us in good days and evil days. I want a cheerful face, a quiet manner, when I come home tired from my work. I do not want a brilliant, intellectual woman, who would insist on my dressing and following her about to operas and balls. I don't like that sort of thing, and I thank Heaven that I have been preserved from that fate. Is that tall gable over there Sibyllenburg?"

"No, that is Baroness Erlach's house. Sibyllenburg is rococo, purest rococo. You will see it at the next turning."

"I am very curious about your home, Leo, and your wife and child."

"You will hardly see Antje unless you go down into the kitchen. We have some guests coming this evening, and so——"

"What? Guests this evening?"

"Will it disturb you, Wolf?"

"Oh, no; not at all. Only I had been looking forward to an evening when we two might talk over old times over a glass of wine, and——"

"Oh, let the old times go; the very memory of them makes me miserable," said Jussnitz. "But here we are."

The carriage had turned in at an iron gateway and

presently stopped before a low flight of steps roofed over with glass. A young lady was standing in the lofty open doorway, above which two genii in fluttering garments with flying ribbons were holding up a coat-of-arms. It was already dusk ; the light which was shed over the hall from a lamp hanging from the ceiling fell on the golden hair of a beautifully shaped head. Wolf could not distinguish the features plainly ; he only saw a pair of large eyes looking out of a white face, and he thought the whole figure, as she stood there in her dark dress with a dazzling white apron, and a key-basket on her arm, was full of a homely grace. A low, pleasant voice sounded in his ear.

“ You are welcome, Herr Doctor. I am so glad to see Leo’s best friend.”

Wolf felt as if at this moment he had come into the home atmosphere for the first time, the German atmosphere for which he had so longed. He felt greatly moved, and he silently pressed the young wife’s hand to his lips. He could not find suitable words in which to reply to her, and without speaking he followed his friend’s wife into the house.

So this was the woman who made Leo so unhappy ? She had bent her head for her husband’s kiss, and replied to his question as to whether Wolf’s room was ready, that she hoped their guest would find everything as he liked it. And with a pleasant nod she said to the latter : “ *Auf wiedersehen*, Herr Doctor ! ” Then she disappeared, with the jingling basket on her arm, through the tall folding-doors that opened into the dining-room.

Wolf stood looking after her. “ Her manner is

perfect ! " he murmured, as the door closed behind the slender figure. He walked slowly toward the carpeted staircase, as Leo, who thought his friend was following him, called back : " Where are you, Wolf ? This way, please ! "

He went into Leo's sitting-room and passed through the studio. In spite of the early hour, it was all brilliantly lighted, and had a rich look, almost too magnificent, perhaps. The chamber which was assigned to him was exceedingly comfortable and only too elegantly furnished. There were rugs scattered about, bear-skins, and costly articles of luxury everywhere.

" Make yourself comfortable, Wolf ; a cup of tea or a glass of wine is quite at your disposal. You need not make a great toilet. Our guests will be here in an hour and I will come to fetch you."

Dr. Maiberg was alone. He had dismissed the servant who brought in his trunk and offered his services in unpacking it. He must be ready in an hour, so he had not very much time. He sat down on the sofa and looked about the room. He must first of all get accustomed to the idea of being Leo's guest. How often that had been the case in those earlier days ! Then he had sat opposite one of the gayest of mortals, in a plain, cane-bottomed chair, before the plainest table imaginable. Colors, papers, pencils, and all sorts of painting apparatus were tossed about in the wildest confusion, and in the midst of it all a tin tea-kettle was singing gayly. The little black stove in the corner of the white-washed room was cold, for the fire was only made once a day, and before the curtainless window of the

attic room the neighbor's cat ran across the roof and wondered that the two men within could laugh so heartily in spite of the poverty, the cold, and the sour wine.

What had happened to Leo? Dr. Maiberg drew his hand hastily across his forehead. The beautiful, slender figure of his young wife rose before his eyes—was she really such a nonentity as Leo made her out? Poor fellow—if it really were so! It must be horrible to live in a constant struggle with pettiness and narrowness, horrible for any man, but most of all for an artist. He pictured to himself the results of this want of character. How horrible to have a wife who did nothing but wash and cook and bake, who simply by her presence drove away the graces and all poetry. Leo's letter had made him more anxious than he had been willing to acknowledge to his friend. 'Thank Heaven, her *appearance*, at least, was by no means prosaic! She had seemed to him like one of those beautiful womanly figures that Beyschlag paints so charmingly. Could the mind really be so great a contradiction of the exterior?

Presently he drew a long breath as he went up to the table, and with an expression of emotion looked at a shallow glass dish in which some pine-branches and Christmas roses were gracefully arranged.

"That could have been no one but *her*; no servant would ever have dreamed of that!" he said under his breath, and he had a vision of her as she stood there arranging the flowers. That certainly did not look like a prosaic nature, to offer

home-flowers as a friendly greeting to the stranger from a foreign land !

The comfortable home-feeling he had had on his arrival came over him with renewed force ; but then it suddenly occurred to him that he was in a fair way to commit a gross sin of omission—he certainly ought, before he appeared among the other guests, to pay his respects to the hostess. He finished dressing as quickly as possible, and then requested a servant to announce him to Frau Jussnitz. The man came back in three minutes to say that his mistress regretted extremely not to be able to receive the Herr Doctor, as she was occupied in the nursery at present.

Leo, who entered a moment after the servant, laughed shortly, as he threw himself down on the sofa, at the queer mixture of disappointment and resignation plainly expressed on the doctor's face.

"Don't take it to heart, Wolf," he said, as the servant left the room. "The nursery is the barrier which my wife erects to enable her to escape all social duties."

"Well, a nursery is a better barrier than the customary headache," said Wolf, carelessly. "There is some reason in that excuse."

"Not in my opinion. This eternal nursery looks like obstinacy to me."

"Perhaps you are too severe in your judgment, Leo. As a physician, I know how to prize the frequent presence of a mother in her nursery."

"Her frequent presence and—a settling down there for good and all are two very different things,

my dear fellow. My wife has trustworthy people in her employ, but—nowadays——”

“Good Heavens, Leo, you seem to consider that a fault for which other men are grateful!” cried Wolf, in the attempt to soften his friend’s judgment. “Count yourself happy in possessing a wife who has a sense of duty which is rare enough in these days. Confound it, Leo, you seem determined to make yourself miserable. Is this gloomy temper all you have gained in exchange for your former condition of care and anxiety? You live in a palace like a fairy dream, and make yourself unhappy over the merest trifles—or is this an especially bad day with you? Perhaps your liver is troubling you. I must direct my attention to it; it may be so. If that is the case, you might be set down in the midst of paradise itself, and you would still grumble.”

“Nonsense, Wolf, nonsense!” said Jussnitz, putting out his hands in self-defence, as the doctor playfully attempted to feel his liver. “Only stay here for a week and then you will think differently. But let us talk of something more agreeable. It is nearly six o’clock now; we will go to the reception rooms. The guests will soon be there, but Antje will be sure not to appear until the Baroness has already looked round for the hostess with her most malicious smile.”

They descended a small winding staircase which led directly from the studio into the billiard-room, passed through the dining-room, and entered the reception-room, which was furnished with princely magnificence. Wolf opened his eyes in surprise;

he glanced from the wonderfully preserved frescos of the ceiling, portraying the triumph of Venus and framed in richly gilded stucco, over the walls hung with yellow silk, over the mirror-like parquet, the rich hangings which covered the doors and windows, over the innumerable chairs, stools, and sofas—all gilded in the purest rococo style. Really, it was all quite perfect, like a saloon in the Trianon. But the smile on the doctor's face was no longer free from discomfort. "Strange," he thought to himself. "I had looked forward to such a very different evening. As we drove here, I pictured to myself a very comfortable room, in which there was no lack of artistic decorations. I saw a white tea-table, around which sat three persons calling up the memory of old times. Now here I am in this state apartment—and——"

His thoughts were interrupted by the clock on the mantelpiece striking six. At that moment a lady came in through the open *portière*; her golden head was turned as if she were looking once more at the arrangement of the table in the dining-room. Wolf was struck dumb. This slender, wonderfully lovely figure, in her black moiré dress with a white fichu over her shoulders, which was crossed on the breast and carried round the waist, ending in a loose knot behind, as Marie Antoinette was fond of wearing it—this figure in its elegant simplicity was absolutely striking against this brilliant background.

She came up to Wolf with a light step, and holding out her hand and looking earnestly at the young physician with a pair of eyes of whose "apparently unfathomable depths" Leo had certainly not said

too much, she begged him to excuse her for not having received him, as she was "just giving her baby a bath."

"My poor wife is obliged to do that herself ; she has no servants," said Leo, ironically.

"Not at all," was her quiet reply. "I like to do it, and—especially since the nurse nearly killed the child once."

"Pray do not give us any reminiscences of that kind, my dear !" cried Leo.

She turned toward him. "Mamma wished me to ask you to excuse her for this evening. She does not feel very well."

"I did not suppose your mother would dine with us," he replied.

She looked quietly at her husband. "And where should mamma dine, if not with us ?" she asked.

Wolf thought he saw the soft, pale face quiver, and it cut him to the heart.

"Oh, good Heavens," muttered Leo, "we are all young people. I thought it would be a bore to her, and would tire her besides."

"My mother—*bored*? She who is so fond of young people?"

And with a deep flush she turned to the fireplace to push back a burning log that had fallen too far forward.

"She never can understand," muttered Leo, angrily, as he disappeared into the adjoining room, a small boudoir, whose brown gold-stamped leather hangings made a very effective contrast to the glittering gold of the reception-room.

Antje took some time to get the refractory

beechen log back into its proper place, and to force back the customary two tears which had come into her eyes. Now for the first time she understood her mother's refusal to join the party—Leo had, no doubt, made it very clear to her that he did not desire her presence. Antje felt as much hurt as if it had been a personal slight to herself. What would this stranger think of it?

When she turned round the latter was standing with his back to her, before a large picture of two little naked cupids crowned with vine-leaves, playing about a very peaceably disposed panther.

"How exquisitely the rosy flesh of the little cupid is painted," he said. "Just look, Frau Jussnitz, at the dimples in that little fat hand; isn't it delightful?"

She came up to him, a lovely sad smile on her pale face.

"Yes, it is," she said; "the hand is so perfectly drawn, just like that of my little Leonie." As she spoke the sad smile faded.

"May I come to see the child to-morrow?" he asked earnestly.

She assented eagerly.

"Yes, Herr Doctor, please do! I will have her brought to my room, for I hope to-morrow you will pay me the visit I missed to-day?"

"I hope I may be received in the young lady's own room," he replied, looking in her face with a kindly smile in his blue eyes; adding: "After I have paid my respects to her mamma in *her* room, where I shall hope to be presented to your mother."

His kind words seemed to her like a soothing

balm poured on an open wound to quiet the pain, and which yet occasioned more pain than if the wound had been left untouched.

"My mother will be very glad to see you," she replied, more coldly, and then she turned quickly to meet a lady, who, accompanied by an immensely tall, light-haired man, had just fluttered in. Wolf could not think of any more fitting word to express her movements. There was really something butterfly-like in the appearance of the slender, almost too slender, brunette. She wore a white gown which was made with a sort of blouse waist with wide, puffed sleeves, and an impossibly narrow skirt, ending in a long train, and was exceedingly becoming to the wearer. Above the very high collar, which was held together by small diamond pins, rose a pretty head with hair cut short, a youthful style which gave a droll look to the little ears with their diamond drops. Her face was pale, and was lighted up by dark eyes, half gay, half languishing. The nose was very short and straight; the scarlet lips seemed constantly smiling, for no reason except to display two rows of sharp, white, very irregular teeth, which were really charming. In her hand she held a round fan with a long handle on which was painted a little rococo picture.

"I entreat you, dear Frau Jussnitz," she cried, "to put my cousin at the very farthest end of the table this evening. He was so excessively naughty on the way here that I would rather forget his presence entirely." As she spoke she gave the blond giant, who smilingly stroked his light beard, a gay glance from her dark eyes.

Jussnitz introduced his friend. Before Wolf could exchange the customary polite phrases with the Baroness, ten or twelve gentlemen had come in, some of whom were in uniform, others in civilian dress.

The Baroness and Antje were the only ladies present. The former, seating herself on a sofa, had instantly the whole crowd of men around her.

Wolf, who had looked round for Antje, discovered the young wife in the adjoining room, where she was giving orders to a servant. In a few minutes she returned and seated herself on the outer edge of the circle, as if she did not belong to it, her eyes looking absently into the distance. Wolf drew his chair up beside her and tried to enter into conversation with her by beginning to talk about his travels. She looked at him attentively as he spoke, but she did not utter a word in reply. When he had minutely described a Christmas eve in Rio without eliciting a single remark, he ceased speaking; he was tired from his journey and he was glad to be quiet.

She did not seem to notice his silence. The laugh of the little Baroness, which was invariably followed by a shout of laughter from the gentlemen, sounded frequently through the room.

"You are in a gay mood, even before dinner, Baroness," said a youthful cavalry officer. "What will you be afterward?"

"I always am, my dear Osten, when I have been really vexed," replied the Baroness, as, still laughing, she put her hand on the arm of the host, to go in to dinner. As she passed out, she turned her

head and looked across at her cousin, and quick as a flash the tip of her little tongue appeared between her red lips, and the saucy face under the short hair looked surprisingly like that of a naughty boy.

"Incredible!" murmured the blond giant, with an expression of infinite amusement. . . .

Antje sat at the head of the table; on her right was Maiberg; on her left an elderly painter with long hair and an interesting but rather peevish-looking thin face, who was inwardly wondering why *he*, who really had accomplished something in the world, must be forced to starve, while this fool of a Jussnitz had been wrapped by fate in silk and velvet. These observations, however, did not prevent him from enjoying his oysters very much.

The Baroness had at once monopolized the conversation; her clear, bell-like voice was heard continually above the laughter of the men; she seemed to be in particularly good humor to-day.

Antje looked scrutinizingly at the table once or twice, and as she found everything in faultless order, from the richly embroidered table-cloth of the same design as the china to the silver epergne filled with flowers, she seemed to take no more notice of what was going on. She drooped her lashes and broke off small morsels of her bread, which she put mechanically between her lips. One of her neighbors was entirely absorbed in his dinner; Maiberg, on the other hand, watched her with discreet curiosity, without addressing her. She had such a lovely, pale face, but her expression was no longer sad, only indifferent. When the Baroness's frequent laugh came to her ears she raised her eyes for a

moment as if startled, and then sank back into her apathy.

"Osten and I want to spend this Christmas at Barrenberg," said Frau von Erlach's cousin.

"They are like Hans who wanted to learn to shiver," cried the Baroness; "they want to see the White Lady of Barrenberg."

"Barrenberg is an old castle on the other side of the Elbe, which belongs to Frau von Erlach's cousin. The colonel stays there sometimes in summer and autumn, but at Christmas time—in fact, all winter—it is always empty. For many years the occupants have deserted the castle at this time of year because, as people say, the White Lady 'walks' there then. They say a Barrenberg once stabbed his brother there on Christmas eve for the sake of a beautiful woman."

This explanation was given to Maiberg, in reply to his request for information, by his next neighbor.

"My belief is, however," added his informant, smiling, "that this desertion of the old barrack at this time of year is not occasioned so much by the White Lady as by the charms of Dresden."

"I would give anything to see the ghost," said Frau von Erlach.

"You can if you like, cousin," said Barrenberg. "I hereby invite you."

"But who else will you ask?"

"Well, what if all who are here now were to celebrate Christmas eve in the old banquet-hall?" cried Barrenberg.

"It is to be hoped there will be snow, and then it will be more romantic," said a well-known land-

scape painter. "The yellow light of the candles will stream out into the deserted court-yard, and we will stand at the window and see the figure of the White Lady coming across the snow through the arched gateway of the little garden—and the traces of her footsteps will be plainly visible in the snow——"

"And," interrupted the Baroness, "we will put out the lights, and we shall see the figure come into the hall and glide past us with eyes cast down—it makes my heart beat just to think of it. So, is it a bargain, good people?"

"But what will become of your two cadets, cousin?" cried Barrenberg, gayly. "You can't possibly burden their youthful spirits with ghostly adventures like that, and besides——"

"They would be in the way, cousin, I know that. They will stay at home, of course."

"*Alone*, on Christmas Day?" cried Lieutenant Osten. "Do you know, Baroness, if *my* mother had treated me like that—I——"

"Well?" inquired the beautiful woman, drinking off a glass of champagne.

"Well—I should have been very much surprised, to say the least," said Osten, quietly.

"My boys can be that too, if they like," she replied. "They can have their presents the next day. To comfort them for my absence I will give them a big box of bonbons and cakes, and then——"

"You will ruin their digestion," remarked Mai-berg, dryly.

"Dear me, Herr Doctor," sighed the Baroness,

"that wouldn't be the worst thing that could happen. Then they would be a little subdued, at least, during the vacation, and wouldn't be so horribly loud and overpowering."

She said this with such a melancholy air that the effect was irresistibly droll, and Baron Barrenberg took up his glass.

"I dedicate this glass to the most affectionate of mothers! So here's to a nice little colic for your sons, Irene, for the soothing of your nerves."

The Baroness clinked her glass with his. "A merry meeting, gentlemen, at Barrenberg on Christmas eve," she cried. "I will coax the White Lady to stop and chat with us. I will wager she will tell us some delightful stories."

The colonel rose and gallantly approached the young hostess with his glass. "May I venture to hope, Frau Jussnitz, that you will not refuse my invitation?"

"I hope you will excuse me, Herr von Barrenberg, but I must spend Christmas eve at home with my mother and my child," she replied, very decidedly and very coldly.

He bowed and returned to his seat.

Leo looked uneasily from his wife to the colonel.

"A rejection, Jussnitz, a downright rejection from your wife."

"Ah, bah!" replied the host, carelessly. "If I persuade her she will come too—won't you, Antje?"

But Antje did not seem to have heard him; she was again absently looking down at her glass, in which the champagne had long ceased to bubble.

With a shrug of his shoulders, Jussnitz turned to

his neighbor. The Baroness was already in the midst of a droll story.

"But I assure you, these diamonds" — she pointed to the glittering stones of a bracelet that Jussnitz had probably been admiring—"were buried once for eleven years. Would you like to hear about it? It is quite a pendant for Chamisso's poem about woman's faith."

"It must be very interesting; so pray go on, tell the story!" the guests cried in chorus.

"I suppose you have all heard of my late Uncle Wittelstein?"

"To be sure, the man with seven wives."

"Oh, nonsense! It was only four! Don't exaggerate, Osten!" she said, reprovingly. "Well, the aforesaid uncle had lost two wives while he was still quite young, for after he had mourned for the first three years, he got engaged again. The bride or the wife, for the time being, was in his eyes always the loveliest one he had ever had. This third one he considered something quite superhuman, and when she was snatched from him after a year of marriage, he was so beside himself with grief that he buried with her a very costly diamond necklace that she had been very fond of.

"This time," continued the Baroness, "he remained a widower for eleven years; but then he met a young girl who far surpassed anything he had ever seen before. He got engaged to her, and of course he wished to adorn his idolized bride to the utmost extent of his power. He began to think about the buried necklace—why should he buy new stones? The dead would not care if he took back

those. So he secretly despatched his old chasseur and the gardener into the vault, which was built in a gloomy spot in the park, with orders to open the coffin of the last Baroness and bring him the necklace. The next morning the chasseur appeared at the bedside of the old man with a crestfallen air. 'Herr Baron,' he stammered out, 'there is nothing in the coffin but a heap of dust.'

"'But the diamonds, the diamonds!' demanded my uncle impatiently.

"'The gracious Baroness has all gone to dust,' said the old man in excuse. 'I——'

"'Well, confound it, sift the Baroness then!' screamed out the affectionate widower. 'And do it on the spot, too!'"

The Baroness carefully selected a candied orange, picked out one or two other fruits, and added: "And so my good aunt was sifted!"

She said the last words with her peculiarly infectious laugh, and the gay company—they had already got to the dessert—joined in.

"And these are the stones!"

She held up her beautiful arm, and showed the sparkling stones.

"Jussnitz," she remarked, turning to her neighbor, "you must positively perpetuate this bracelet in my portrait—if you should ever find time, that is, to put the finishing touches to it. Of course I am modest, and withdraw into the background before such an important and at the same time such a charming work as you are engaged on at present. You know I am always considerate of my friends."

"What are you painting now, Jussnitz?" cried several gentlemen at once.

"A portrait," he replied.

This turn the conversation had taken was evidently disagreeable to him.

"A study, but *such* a study!" exclaimed Frau von Erlach. "I assure you, my friends, this young Spanish girl is absolutely bewitching. If I could only find out where the original is to be found, I would invite her to my house, only just to gaze at her beauty for once to my heart's content. By the way, Frau Jussnitz, are you not jealous—not the least little bit?"

Antje rose at this moment, a signal that the dinner was at an end. The gentlemen started up from their chairs, leaving the half-emptied glasses and bottles behind them; the Baroness cast a mocking glance of surprise at the young hostess, but Antje's face was pale and calm as she returned the bows of the gentlemen with a slight inclination of the head, and begged them to come into the yellow salon to take their coffee.

Presently they were chatting as gayly as before. The Baroness smoked a cigarette in the circle of her admirers; Antje talked with the old painter about a copy of a picture by Watteau; he told her the original was in Pillnitz; Lieutenant Osten occupied himself, with the aid of his host, in making those mysterious signs on a great sheet of paper which are called "building a temple." Dr. Mai-berg came nearer, with a look of surprise on his face.

"What, Leo, a game of hazard?"

"It is very harmless, I assure you," declared Lieutenant von Osten. "We only play for nickels."

Leo looked up and saw that Antje was just disappearing between the *portières*.

"Please, Wolf," he said hastily, "go after her and tell her I beg she will come back as soon as she can."

Maiberg went out into the hall and found his young hostess just going upstairs.

"Frau Jussnitz," he said, "one word, if you please."

She rested both hands on the banister and bent down toward him. The light from the chandelier made her fair hair glisten like gold.

"Leo begs you will not leave us to ourselves too long," he said.

"I am coming back in a moment," she replied softly. "I—" she hesitated—"I was only going to say good-night to my mother and look at the baby a moment," she added quickly.

He stepped back, and she went on upstairs. What a soft, childish voice she had!

And upstairs, by the bed of the sleeping child, she seated herself at the feet of a stately old lady and nestled her head like a tired child against her mother's knee.

She did not speak even here; she only stroked her mother's hands—those large white hands, which bore such a character of energy—as if by this caress she would make up to her mother for all that had hurt her.

"You have no idea," began Frau Klaartjie Frey pleasantly, "what a pleasure it has been to me to

have my little grandchild so all to myself this evening. I told her stories and sang songs to her, as I used to do to you ; it was so delightful, Antje ! ”

The daughter pressed a kiss on the fingers she held in hers. She knew very well that her mother only said this to put out of her mind any suspicion that her remaining upstairs was not done of her own free will—as if Antje had not seen the old lady take her gray silk dress out of the wardrobe in the afternoon and get her diamond pin out of its case to adorn herself for the guests of the house.

“ I don’t see how you bear it, child,” continued her mother. “ I never could endure parties like this, and I was very glad that, when I said I wished it were well over, Leo said I must not put any constraint upon myself.”

How this woman, who was truth itself, could dissemble to spare her child !

Still Antje did not speak. She got up at length. “ I must go back,” she said, with averted face.

“ I hope you will sleep well, dear, and enjoy yourself,” her mother called after her. “ I am going to bed, for I am very tired.”

This, too, was untrue. A light burned in the bedroom of Frau Klara Frey till far into the night ; she herself sat before a table in her fur-lined dressing-gown, with a heap of papers before her. At this moment there was no longer that expression of kindness she had shown her daughter on her full face with its Dutch features. It now wore a look of deep anxiety and disgust, and when she had added up several columns of figures on a bit of paper, she laid aside her pencil, folded her hands,

and gazed with a startled expression at the very considerable amount.

“Merciful Heavens !” she murmured, quite overcome.

After a while she rose wearily and with difficulty. The hands which lifted the lace cap from the light hair, through which ran an occasional silver thread, shook, and a deep sigh echoed through the quiet room.

“If she were only happy, at least ! But this must not go on,” she said after a while ; “it will never do !”

She started suddenly. She had heard no step, had not heard the door open—and yet there stood Antje, still in full toilet, but pale and worn, looking in astonishment at her mother.

“Are you still up, mother ?” she said at length.

The tall, rather stout woman glanced at the clock—it was half-past three. “Yes, child ; the older one grows the less sleep one needs. I was looking through the accounts, as you asked me to do, and I did not notice how the time was going. But what do you want, Antje ?”

The daughter’s face grew a shade paler. “I wanted to ask you—you are used to it, mother, dear—children are always wanting something from their mothers, aren’t they ?” She tried to speak unconcernedly, but she put her hand to her throat once or twice, as if something were choking her. “I wanted to ask you if you could give me four hundred marks. Leo has—Leo wants it at once, and I—you know, mother, dear, it is near the end of the quarter, and I haven’t got so much——”

Her arms had fallen to her side and her head was drooping. She looked like a child who was asking for some favor that she knew was too great to be granted.

"Does Leo want the money this minute?"

"Yes."

"But, for Heaven's sake, what for?" inquired her mother.

"They have been playing a little just for sport, mother—Leo does not care for it, but the Baroness is so fond of it, and now—Leo has lost."

Frau Bergrath Frey went to the bureau beneath the looking-glass without another word and took out four bank-notes.

"Here, Antje," she said, huskily.

"Ah, mother, dear, do not be angry!"

"Go now, child, and go to bed."

"Dearest mother——"

"I am tired to death, Antje!"

The young wife kissed her mother and went away with the money.

Her mother stood motionless, with her hands clasped, and looked after her.

"Merciful God!" she said at length; then she sat down in the arm-chair before her bed, and the tall, powerful woman seemed sinking under the weight of a heavy burden.

"If Frey had lived to see this! How his prophecies are all coming true, each one, step by step, in frightful earnest," she murmured. And again she clasped her hands. She saw her daughter smile, that sad, weary smile, that she had never seen in her before. "Oh, if she had only married Ferdinand, if

she had only listened to us ! But—of what use is it to complain now ? Help me, O God ! Do not crush the child—she is all I have !” she prayed, and the tears rolled down her cheeks. But as laughter and the sounds of voices exchanging good-nights came up from the court below, mingled with the jingling of sleigh-bells, she loosed her clasped hands and clenched her right hand involuntarily. “But *I* am still to the fore,” she murmured. “Do not fear, Antje, you have a mother still, and he shall bend or break !”





CHAPTER VI.

THE next morning Antje was standing in the nursery with Dr. Maiberg, beside her child's bed. The child was rather feverish, and she had begged her guest to come and see if it was anything serious.

He reassured her, and, delighted with the pretty, golden-haired little creature, he sat down by the bed and began to play with it; as he did so he looked at his hostess with some concern. Antje felt very wretched; she had unnaturally red cheeks, and her eyes were dim and red with crying.

"Is Leo going to his studio to-day?" inquired the young doctor.

"He has not said anything to me about it, but I think he will stay at home to-day—on your account, doctor—you——"

"Oh, he must not do that," said Wolf Maiberg; "his business must not suffer because I am here, or I should feel obliged to pack my trunk and go away at once."

"Oh, one day, more or less—" she replied, absently. "It would even do Leo good—he has looked so ill lately; have you not noticed it?"

But she did not look at him as she spoke; her eyes were turned anxiously toward the door, which was hung with a *portière*, embroidered with all manner of droll figures—birds, cats, dolls, dishes,

and so forth. Maiberg heard voices in the next room ; he recognized Leo's voice in short sentences, but the prevailing sound was that of a woman's voice, a wonderfully deep voice, speaking slowly and emphatically. He could not hear any words ; Antje need not have been so careful to pull the curtain together with her trembling hand.

"Did Leo paint this frieze ?" inquired the guest, pointing upward, where below the gilded ceiling a broad light blue strip ran round the room, against which were painted charming groups of playing children.

"Ah, no," replied Antje ; "he only designed it." And she listened again to the voices in the next room.

Leo's voice had now grown louder. "Papa—cross ?" asked the child with an anxious look, as Maiberg got up to leave the room. But while he was still stroking the baby's head, the woman's voice spoke so loud and emphatically that every word could be distinguished.

"Let me say my say, my dear son-in-law, if you please. Good Heavens, do you think it is a pleasure to *me* to say such things ? It is bad enough that I find it necessary to say them. I tell you you must change your way of living, because you owe it to your wife and child ! I will not have my daughter reduced to starvation. And if you cannot make up your mind to live according to your means, then you can pursue your mad course alone, and I will gladly take my daughter home with me—the sooner the better !"

Maiberg heard these last words as he was going

through the hall. And as he hurried on he heard Antje's despairing cry, "Why, mother—dear mother !"

He could not stay in the house, so he went down the steps and out into the garden. There he wandered about the paths, taking no heed of the clear winter landscape and the white snow which glistened and sparkled in the sunshine. That deep woman's voice upstairs had uttered his own convictions. Last evening he had longed to take his friend by the shoulder and shake him and ask : "Man, have you gone mad ? Do you call *this* social pleasure, this confused chatter, this drinking, smoking, and playing ? How you have deteriorated ! Stop short, Leo ; you are sinning against your better nature. I know you better than you know yourself—you are plunging into a life which does not suit you in the least !" But what good would it have done ? When Leo once got an idea into his head he would stick to it through thick and thin, and so his mother-in-law—for who else could it be ?—had gone quite the wrong way to work with him.

An uncomfortable feeling came over him ; he began to plan to cut short his visit. It is horrible to be a guest in a house where dissension is rife. At this moment he heard his name called, and turning, he saw Leo at the open window.

"Come up here, Maiberg !" The tall, fair man went into the house and entered the studio. Leo was walking up and down, whistling softly to himself.

"Sit down," he said ; "take a cigar and comfort

me in my grief at parting. My mother-in-law is going to leave the house in a few minutes."

"You have had a quarrel with her, Leo?"

"Oh, not at all! My mother-in-law only is of opinion that, as I do not earn anything at painting, I had better find some other position in the world, as a clerk in her counting-house, for instance, or something of the sort. We could not agree upon this, so the good lady prefers to leave my house. That is all. She is of an energetic nature and is fond of sudden resolves," he added. "You can see that, for within a quarter of an hour she will be quite ready to leave. Yes, she is energetic indeed; her whole corps of work-people at home shake in their shoes before her, Maiberg. Actually, there comes the carriage, now."

He went hastily to the window and looked down.

Wolf stood beside him and saw how Antje kissed the old lady again and again, and how, as the carriage rolled away, she still stood there, quite regardless of the cold wind, and looked at the marks of the wheels in the snow.

"I am sorry for your wife," said Maiberg, at length.

"Why? I told her she could go and stay with her mother for a while, but she will not."

"The gracious Frau begs the gentlemen to come to breakfast," said the servant, who entered just then.

Antje met them in the dining-room as if nothing at all had happened. Only the traitorous twitching of her pale face gave evidence of her inward agitation. Leo spoke of the last exposition in Munich

and of the last new opera. Sherry sparkled in the glasses, and the servant passed round sauerkraut cooked with oysters in genuine Munich fashion.

Maiberg could not keep his eyes off the woman who sat between them.

"May I look after my little patient again, by and by?" he inquired.

She assented pleasantly.

"Are you going to the opera with Maiberg this evening?" inquired Leo. "I have something to do in the meantime, but we can drive home together."

"Yes," she said again, nodding her head like a beautiful automaton.

"But," interposed Maiberg, "will it suit you, Frau Jussnitz? You look tired, and I am sure you did not go to bed till daylight. Leo, I must protest that I am not so bent on pleasure as you seem to imagine."

"Then stay at home!" he replied.

"If you are willing, Frau Jussnitz, we will spend the evening at home. I have letters to write, besides, which I must not put off any longer."

"Yes," she said for the third time. Then she got up and left the room.

Immediately after dinner Leo drove into town. Antje heard the carriage roll out of the court-yard. She was in the dining-room, occupied in putting up and locking away the silver which had been taken out for yesterday's dinner. It was after four o'clock, and twilight had already settled down. She mechanically wiped off every silver spoon, every fork, with a dainty bit of chamois leather, and put them

away, piece by piece, on the blue velvet cushion of the great leather case.

Her thoughts were with Leo. What would he do in his injured pride? She felt sorry for him in her inmost soul. She had never seen her mother so violent. When Antje, white with terror, rushed into the room that morning where they were talking together, the old lady, flushed with anger, was sitting at the table with the bank-book before her. The hand she had just dashed down on the table was still clenched as it rested on the bright table-cover, beside the inkstand. Leo, white as chalk, but with a supercilious smile curling his lips, was standing in a careless attitude before the stove, as if warming his hands.

"Mother, I beg of you," cried Antje. "What have you been saying?"

"That you will be welcome in my home, at any moment," was the bitter reply; "that I have still a warm corner for you, and that I hope you will come *soon*, before you have to see how everything here—is going to ruin!"

"Now you know; decide for yourself!" said Leo, dryly.

But she paid no attention to him. She went up to her mother with clasped hands, and looked at her with an imploring glance.

"You need not repeat it, mamma," Leo continued; "my wife knows that I sell 30 pictures, and that I am fond of champagne and fine horses——"

"Leo, say no more about it!" interrupted his wife. "All that I have is yours; I have never complained of your expenditures. If my mother does

so, she means it kindly and—perhaps she is not wrong. Oh, I beg of you, do not quarrel ; please, please do not !”

“You have never yet complained, child ; that is true. You would not say a word even if the very last penny were to be flung out of the window to-day. It is for that that *I* am here ; it is for that very reason that I have simply explained to him that if you go on living as you do now, your whole fortune will be gone in six or eight years—and that is the end of everything ! Or do you fancy perhaps that after that you can devour the iron-works for your bread and butter ? By Heavens, I will take very good care that that never happens !”

The resolute woman wiped the beads of perspiration from her forehead.

Antje was silent.

“Leave us, Leo,” she entreated, at length.

“Excuse me. It interests me to hear what rules your mother prescribes for our guidance in the future,” was Leo’s reply.

“Nothing more,” Frau Klaartje slowly replied—“nothing more than that which Antje learned while she lived in my house—simplicity, economy, and labor, labor such as beseems a man who has a wife and child to care for ; not an art that brings in nothing ! And now I must ask you for a timetable.”

Leo looked at the clock. “The express train for Leipzig goes in three-quarters of an hour,” he said, very calmly.

“Leo !” The young wife’s heart almost stood still.

"Mother!" she implored, "stay here—do not let us part like this!"

"You will come and make me a visit, Antje?"

"Oh, mother, it is impossible for you to go away like this!"

"Of course I must go! No one shall ever say that I set my own child against her husband. I have warned you, and you know now. You must help me to pack my things, Antje."

And she had gone without looking at the young man again. Antje saw how he bowed down almost to the ground in mockery of her, but she saw it through her tears. . . .

At length the silver was all put away. She stood there in the faint twilight and felt almost afraid, she was so lonely and so sad at heart. Leo had had no word of comfort for her. He had avoided her eyes, and yet she would have shown him so gladly that she did not approve of the harsh words of her excited mother. She thought and thought how she might give him some encouragement, some sign of acknowledgment of this. Her mother had meant well, but how could she use such words to him as "an art that brings in nothing"?

Antje pressed the palms of her hands together in her inward torture. "If I only knew of something," she thought—"something that would give him great pleasure!" But she could think of nothing, and with a sigh she mounted the stairs to her own room.



CHAPTER VII.

MAIBERG had asked for a lamp, and he sat down to write, but he did not touch the pen. Lost in thought, he leaned back in a corner of the sofa and smoked a cigar. It had been more than uncomfortable at dinner. Antje had only answered yes and no ; Leo was excited and abstracted, had looked at his watch oftener than was exactly civil, and had at length driven away half an hour earlier than the time he had first appointed. He had taken leave abruptly of his wife and his guest, saying : " I hope you will not be too much bored." Antje had then made a cup of coffee at a side-table, had conscientiously remained sitting beside her guest till he had drained the last drop without uttering a word except "*Gesegnete Mahlzeit !*" when they separated.

With his head leaning on his hand, he pondered over the matter. Which was to blame ? Whose fault was it that there was no happiness in this household ? Everything about him was so still that it seemed as though the house was deserted. What was the young wife doing now, he wondered. Was she sitting by her child's bed ? Was she weeping because her mother had left her so suddenly, on account of her quarrel with Leo ? He gave a sudden yawn ; really it was horribly dull in this Sibyllenburg. At last he took up a book, "*Der*

Hungerpastor," by Raabe. He knew it well and was very fond of it. Ah, yes, hunger is a bad thing—there are people who have great hunger and some who have little. Leo had a great deal, but Antje, on the other hand, seemed to have none at all. Strange that these two should have come together ! And Maiberg knew for what Leo hungered—for fame, for recognition, for a satisfying activity, for a heart that could sympathize with him, could be ambitious for him, and which he believed he could not find in his wife. To be sure, she hungered, too ; she hungered for his confidence, for his love ; they both hungered according to their different natures.

"Would the Herr Doctor take a cup of tea with the gracious lady ?" inquired a servant at the door.

He said he would be glad to do so, and followed the man through Leo's studio and a little ante-room into the "boudoir of the gracious lady," as the servant designated it. Maiberg shook his head. It was an exceedingly coquettish room in which he found himself. Walls, chairs, and ottomans were covered with silk damask of a large-flowered pattern ; the heavy curtains above a divan were held back by a laughing cupid charmingly modelled in bronze. The pieces of furniture with their brass ornaments were of graceful shapes but florid in style. Costly groups of old Meissen porcelain, chiefly scenes from Greek mythology, stood about on consoles, *étagères*, and before the mirrors. Here a genuine rococo fan was lying negligently on a table, as if a fair hand had but lately used it ; there, a piece of music was spread open on the rack of a magnificent old spinet—Maiberg could see that it was

a French love-song of the time of the Pompadour ; and in the book-case were spread out whole rows of volumes in faded blue and pink velvet, in which the unappreciated spirits of that time had written down their contributions to the memoirs of the period.

It was a charming carnival caprice, this whole room, but an utterly impossible habitation for a woman like Antje.

She came in at this moment. Her gray cheviot dress, with its trimming of dark braid, looked strangely out of place in this coquettish magnificence.

"It is very kind of you to give me your company," she said to Maiberg ; "the tea will be here in a minute."

"Is this *your* room, your sitting-room ?" he inquired, recovering from his first surprise.

"Yes, it is my room. Leo had it fitted up for me."

"And do you like it ?"

She was a little embarrassed.

"I do not find it very cosy for sitting in. I have another one next to the nursery, that is——"

"Oh, then, do let us drink our tea in the other one," he cried, interrupting her.

She smiled. "I am quite willing, Herr Doctor ; but you must make allowances. Leo says that room is perfectly dreadful."

"I cannot understand Leo, Frau Jussnitz. How can a man persist in living in state-apartments like this ? The room ought to show the character of its occupant ; it ought to be comfortable and homelike.

This room is simply a collection of the requisites for a stage decoration of an old French comedy. And you are not in the least like a rococo shepherdess."

He spoke quite sharply as he followed her down the corridor. "I really cannot understand how Leo can ever manage to paint a picture in his studio. It is full of color, and it must confuse and distract him. Do you know what Goethe says, Frau Jussnitz? He says that simple, tasteful surroundings stimulate his thoughts; that magnificent rooms with elegant furnishings are for people who have no thoughts, or wish to have none."

She had just put her hand on the handle of a door, and she turned at this. "It is possible that Goethe may be right," she replied, quietly. "A man can write poetry when he is blind, but a painter makes poetry with his eyes."

He looked at her in surprise, but she silently crossed the threshold of a small room and said with a graceful gesture of invitation: "Now, find a very comfortable seat, Herr Doctor. If you will allow me, I will take a piece of work."

Ah, this was just what he had fancied her surroundings should be.

"It is very cosy here," he said, half to himself, looking round the little room, with its simple and yet graceful furniture. There was her work-table by the window under a group of broad-leaved plants. The writing-table, the comfortable sofa, over which hung the portraits of a gentleman and a lady, probably the parents of the hostess; the water-color sketches beneath them no doubt portrayed the home where Antje had spent her youth. All sorts of girl-

ish ornaments were hanging and standing about. A piece of half-finished work lay on the table, with a book beside it. Maiberg could see that it was a cook-book. "Nuremberg Gingerbread, after old German receipts," he read on the title-page. But he could not smile, for he was carried back to the old, long-forgotten days, when he was a little fellow standing beside his stately mamma, opening wide his little mouth for a taste of the sweet dough of the Christmas-cake. And as he went up to the writing-table to read an illuminated text which hung above it, those wonderful words of the New Testament came into his mind :

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." And : "Charity suffereth long and is kind, is not easily provoked, seeketh not her own."

He turned and looked at her as if he saw her now for the first time. She was sitting at the table, busying herself about the tea. How noiselessly, how gracefully she did the honors ! The little red-embroidered apron was so becoming to her, and the lamp-light shed such a pretty glow over her smooth golden hair. The clock ticked and the lilies-of-the-valley sent out such a delicate fragrance through the room. From the adjoining room came the voice of the child, who was playing with her toys. It was a world full of an indescribable homelike charm.

Maiberg felt as if he had already lived through hours like this ; but where and when ? Or was it the ideal of his dream of the future, which he had so often pictured to himself ? He ~~silently~~ took the

cup from his young hostess's hand and sat down opposite her, but she put out the lamp under the tea-urn and took up her work—it was a child's apron. And then she said: "Tell me something about Leo, Herr Doctor, when he was a gay and careless youth and wandered about the world with you. He always declares that was the happiest time of his life. He was quite different then, was he not?" she added.

He was silent, and stirred his tea with his spoon without looking up. It was not until he saw that she had dropped her work in her lap that he began, without answering her last question:

"Yes, yes; that was a merry time; every one has to go through it some time. But that sort of thing always seems much pleasanter on looking back, because one forgets all the disagreeable part of it."

He could think of nothing better to say than this commonplace, and cast about for another subject of conversation.

Then he heard her say:

"Don't you think that Leo suffers horribly from the want of recognition his talent meets with?"

"Leo is young still, Frau Jussnitz; and besides, he is only just beginning to work in earnest."

She pricked her finger just then. The hand which held the needle shook violently. She looked past the young doctor with a quite changed expression. There it was again, that horrible, sickening feeling that had come over her from time to time since the day before. A woman's dark, beautiful face seemed to float vaguely before her eyes, a Spanish mantilla on her head, held up by a tall comb, a

pomegranate blossom behind her ear ; and she heard again the Baroness's clear voice saying : " Are you not jealous, Frau Jussnitz, not the least little bit ? "

Then she shook her head as if she were brushing off a noxious insect, and gave a sigh. No, that was impossible. What could she be thinking of ! And she said aloud : " If his new picture would only succeed, if he might only meet with some encouragement ! I believe it would have a great influence on his mood. Don't you think so too, Herr Doctor ? "

" I am sure of it," he replied.

" I wanted to ask a favor of you," she began, after a pause, and her face lighted up like that of a person to whom suddenly an excellent idea has occurred.

" You have only to command me, Frau Jussnitz."

" I want you to help me to cure Leo."

" With all my heart ! "

She clasped her hands over her work and looked earnestly at him with shining eyes. " May I count on your silence ? " she asked.

" Certainly, Frau Jussnitz."

" You are quite at home in Berlin—have you still any connections there ? "

" Certainly."

" There is a picture of Leo's there for sale in an art gallery. I would like to buy it. You understand he must *never* know of it. It must be given out that an Englishman has bought it. I am sure you can easily manage it ? Please, Doctor, do not say no," she added, anxiously, as he remained silent. " You don't know how my heart is set on carrying out this plan."

"And what if Leo should find it out?"

"He must not find it out," she urged; "and if he should—then no one will be to blame but myself. I entreat you——"

"I will do it if you think it is best."

"Oh, thank you!"

She caught his hand and pressed it gently. "I know this will encourage Leo."

She got up, went to her writing-table, and took out a little silver money-box. She blushed like a rose as she took out from it, unperceived as she thought, a whole row of gold pieces.

"Leo's prices are not very low," she said, as she came back with an embarrassed but happy smile. She put the glittering coins into a crocheted purse and gave it to Maiberg, who took it with averted face. He knew she had taken it from the baby's money-box, for he had heard Leo say to his wife the night before when he had lost: "Have you got any money?" And when she shook her head, Leo had said only one word: "Mother." Then Antje went out and came back with the money.

Maiberg excused himself on the plea of going at once to write a letter about this matter.

He went to his room with a sad smile on his lips, and this smile did not fade until he had dipped his pen in the ink to write to an old friend to beg him to manage the purchase of the picture. He wished himself a hundred miles away from this place. She wished to make her husband forget the insult that had been put upon him; she wanted to save him for herself and the child, and she thought she could do it in this way. How many times she must have

tried to draw him to her ! He hated Leo at that moment !

And over there in the cheerful nursery the young wife was fondling her baby and talking to it : “ You shall have something better in place of it, Mousie ; you shall have a nice, merry papa, who will love your mother. We haven’t any pleasure in the world without papa, have we, Mousie ? ”

And she clasped the little one’s hands between her own, and made her pray that papa’s new picture might be a success, and that he—she blushed crimson as she said this, and did not look at the child—that he might get it done very soon.





CHAPTER VIII.

IT was Christmas eve. A perfect hurricane was raging through the streets of Dresden ; light flurries of snow were blown from the roofs, the statues, and the branches of the trees, and a few heavy rain-drops were driven through the air by the strong wind ; the streets were covered with soft mud, which splashed up to the tops of the carriages and to the hats of the passers-by. It was bad weather for Christmas, every one said. The big rain-drops pattered also against the panes of Herr Jussnitz's studio in the quiet suburban street, but that only made it seem all the more comfortable in the large, well-warmed room which might seem very simple to the ordinary observer. The walls, covered with a cheap pale yellow paper, were adorned here and there with reproductions of some celebrated old Gobelin tapestry ; between these hung antique weapons, and enormous Chinese vases stood about here and there. The floor was covered with an admirable imitation of an old oriental carpet, in which even the spots and holes were not wanting. There was but little furniture ; a divan covered with a Smyrna carpet, a very deep, comfortable arm-chair covered with Persian saddle-bags, a small table in front of the stove—that was all.

Before this table, which still bore the remains of a

luncheon, sat Aunt Polly in a genuine Renaissance chair, slowly consuming a caviar-roll, with her eyes steadfastly fixed on her niece or Herr Jussnitz.

Hilda was standing on one side of the easel, in a costume of yellow brocade trimmed with black lace ; the mantilla fell from the back of her head over her beautiful neck, her right hand held the fan, her left had grasped the heavy folds of her dress, which she was crushing between her fingers ; she stood there as if she were disgusted with the whole thing, and had the greatest mind in the world to run away.

"Heaven knows," cried Jussnitz, looking at the girl, "that you manage somehow to look different every day of your life ! Now your eyes have such a look in them that a dagger would be more suitable for you than a fan. Drink a glass of sherry, Hilda, you are chilly ; and don't be so horribly impatient ; your trials will soon be over."

Hildegarde von Zweidorf gave a hard, short laugh.

"Oh, yes," she said ; "it is quite time, and auntie will be thankful enough to be released ; won't you, Aunt Polly ?"

She turned her head so hastily that the long gold ear-rings with the movable stones glittered, and looked gloomily at the little woman, at the same time casting a glance at her which said plainly :

"You will say yes, at once !"

"Yes," said Aunt Polly ; "my household affairs will get on better when I can stay at home more."

"And I," added Hilda, with quivering lips—"I shall probably go home for a while."

Leo was painting her hair, and was so absorbed that he did not hear this last remark.

"I shall probably go home for a few weeks," she repeated, opening and shutting her fan.

"Indeed?" he said. "How happens that? It will not be very good for your studies."

She looked at him with a strange expression in her eyes, a look as of unshed tears. But she laughed again.

"Well, I have not asked you why you are going into the country to spend Christmas."

Again he made no reply; he had stepped back and was contemplating his picture.

"Just come here, Hilda; look at this face and then look at your own in the glass. Are they at all alike?"

"No," she replied shortly, without moving.

"I should really like to know," he continued, now looking into her pretty, piquant face with an expression of concern, "what is the matter with you! You ought to see a doctor, Hilda. I fear I must reproach myself for——"

"You!" she interrupted him, in a shrill, constrained tone of contempt. "No; you may feel perfectly easy, if you please; there is nothing the matter with me, nothing at all."

"You are in a bad temper to-day, Hilda, and you upset me, too," he exclaimed, putting his mahlstick away in the corner. "I can make the few little changes just as well without you. I will put the dress on the lay-figure. I hope in your next and last sitting you will be more graciously disposed."

"Then I am dismissed for to-day?" she said, with a smile which did not hide her pain.

"What an expression ! I see that it is hard for you, and I will not torment you any longer."

Hilda turned away and went through the *portière* into the adjoining room, where she was in the habit of changing her dress. Leo, in the meantime, went up to Aunt Polly, who was just putting away her knitting.

"Will you lay this packet under the Christmas-tree this evening for Fräulein Hilda ?" he said, giving her a small packet.

"Yes, I can do that," said Aunt Polly. "We have a tree, though it is only an amusement for children, but one must have a little pleasure once in a while. Hilda will be delighted, for she has no one to give her presents except me. And, of course, I can only give her useful things."

She put the little packet into her pompadour bag under the gray woollen stocking, and got up to put on her cloak.

Jussnitz forgot to help her. He had gone back to his easel and was looking at his picture.

In a few moments the young girl reappeared. She came up to him with a firm step.

"Good-by," she said, shortly, giving him her hand without looking at him.

"Good-by, Hilda," he replied, holding the burning little hand firmly in his own. "Good-by, Hilda. *Auf Wiedersehen*, and a happy Christmas !"

He felt how she trembled. She hastily snatched her hand away so that her rather large woollen glove remained between his fingers.

"Thank you, Hilda !" he cried with a laugh. It sounded as constrained as her own a moment be-

fore. He put the glove so strangely won into the pocket of his velvet coat.

She merely shrugged her shoulders without speaking, and preceded her aunt out of the door. Frau Polly ran after her with her bonnet-strings flying.

"Do wait a minute, for Heaven's sake!" she cried, almost out of breath. "I am not ready yet."

Hilda had already reached the hall-door below. The wind whistled past her; it rattled the closed shutters, and bent the boughs of the tall trees. There was a soft, spring-like odor in the air. And the girl looked up at the clouds that were flying over her head, with longing eyes. Her lips were open as if she were thirsty, and she felt as if she must cry out in the midst of the storm and thus free her soul from an overpowering burden. The rain-drops fell on her pale face as she lifted it up; the wind blew her hat back and scattered her hair about over her low forehead. The sad young face had a pathetic beauty at this moment.

"Is Herr Jussnitz at home?" asked a voice near her at this moment. In front of her, only three steps lower down, stood a gentleman and a lady. The question had come from the latter. It was a soft, childishly clear voice, and a lovely face looked out of the peacock-blue capote that she wore.

"Yes," said Hilda, and she stepped aside, grasping her hat with both hands to put it straight as she did so.

The lady came up the steps. Her eyes looked out under her half veil straight into Hilda's face. Hilda turned slowly away, and as she looked back

the young matron, the latter also turned her head and their eyes again met. The stately, light-haired man was still standing, with his hat in his hand, outside the door, from which Aunt Polly was now emerging, courtesying and begging pardon. Then he, too, disappeared in the doorway of the villa.

"Who are they, I wonder?" said Aunt Polly.

"Do come," replied Hilda, impatiently. But she was wondering the same thing, only more passionately and with more interest.

An elegant equipage was driving slowly up and down before the garden gate.

"That must be their carriage," sighed Aunt Polly, contemplating the muddy street.

"Very likely," assented Hilda. And they walked on. Aunt Polly said no more; this was one of Hilda's "cross days," and there was nothing for it but to let her have her sulk out, if one didn't wish to get into a rage, and that Aunt Polly *would* not do. In the first place it was bad for her, and then — on account of the future! "If we had only got as far as that!" she thought. "Christmas is such a capital opportunity for that sort of thing. One never sees so many engagements announced in the newspapers as in the Christmas holidays."

When they reached the horse-car, Aunt Polly indulged herself in a ride, because it was Christmas eve, and because it was such a dismal day. At one of the stopping-places the carriage they had seen drove rapidly past them. Hilda recognized Jussnitz sitting on the back seat.

"Those were the Sibyllenburgers," said a young girl, whose sealskin collar and the shape of her hat,

as well as her long, narrow face, proclaimed her as English, to a very German-looking old lady in a brocaded silk cloak, by whose voluminous folds Hilda's slender figure was almost blotted out.

"Do you know them, Maud?"

"Yes—no, not exactly; I know the horses, they are very handsome."

"So he is going to Sibyllenburg!" thought Hilda. She would have given a great deal to know where this Sibyllenberg was situated. She resolved to ask the grocery-woman, but in any case she could buy a map of Dresden and its vicinity.

Buy it—oh, buy it, indeed! Hilda had not a single penny to her name. She had done no work; the small amount of pocket-money which she used to earn by painting fans and purses had failed her since her removal to Dresden. She had not touched a brush; she had *been painted*, and on those afternoons that she might have had for herself she had sat dreaming by the window, with a pretence of work before her, or she had wandered about the streets in torturing restlessness, farther and farther, till at last she came home tired to death. . . .

Hilda started violently as Aunt Polly pulled at her cloak, and signified that they would get out. She walked like one in a dream behind the stout little woman, through the streets thronged with Christmas shoppers. What had *she* to do with all this? She could not bear to look at them, these laughing faces of young and old, these crowds of people, the booths, the Christmas-trees; and she thrust angrily away a little fellow who was pursuing her with some bright paper stars, crying indefatiga

bly : " Only ten pfennigs. They are the last, gracious lady ! "

The child staggered backward, and the tears gushed out of his eyes. " Oh, now, now, " said a stately man, as he picked up the boy and set him on his feet, " the little fellow isn't made of wood ! " But when he saw the girlish face with its dark eyes, pale and rigid in its angry scorn, he said no more, and hurrying on, muttered to himself : " By Jove, she looks desperate, though ! "

Aunt Polly did not notice, when she stopped in front of a shop-window now and then, that the girl stamped her foot angrily on the pavement ; she did not notice her pallor and the blue, tightly-compressed lips, until they came out of the fish-shop where she had been bargaining for the tiniest carp that had ever been caught.

" Good gracious, what ails you ? " she asked then.

" Homesickness ! " was the curt reply.

" Homesickness ? You ? " cried Aunt Polly, incredulously ; and as Hilda was silent, she added : " I should sooner have thought of the skies falling than of your being homesick. "

But Aunt Polly was obliged to believe in it at last, for her niece was so pale and still as she sat in the little sitting-room, she paid so little heed to the mysterious allusions to Santa Claus, who had something worth while this time, that poor Aunt Polly set up the tiny Christmas-tree in the best room with a sigh and a shake of the head, and thought to herself that it was better to be quite alone on such a day than to be with some one who was as cross and disagreeable as her niece.

A box had arrived from the Zweidorfs in Altweidel, and Aunt Polly set it on the table under the tree and added several pairs of stockings she had knitted ; then she went into the kitchen and dressed her tiny carp. When it got dark she would light the lamps.

Hilda remained motionless in the sitting-room. She had not spoken falsely ; she was homesick, or at least she imagined so. She thought how her mother would be slipping into the Christmas room now, with her few poor little presents hidden in her apron, but with a happy face. They always had presents in her poverty-stricken home, even though they were ever so insignificant ; their father never allowed Christmas to go by without its little pleasures. He began to save up again from the New Year for the next Christmas, and each one found something at her place. There is something touching in a love like that, and it does exist in spite of poverty. Oh, if she were only at home now, if only for a quarter of an hour !

But, no, she would not go if she could. All at once she sat up straight in her old high-backed chair, which had belonged to the deceased Berger. What should she do at home ? Submit to questions as to what she had been doing ? What she had gained and attained in that strange world where she had hoped to make her fortune ?

She gave a low, bitter laugh. "Nothing !" she said half-aloud ; "nothing—nothing !" she repeated again, clenching her little fist.

She had gained nothing, she had only lost—her young heart.

And he to whom she had given it did not think it was worth the trouble of stooping for, or at least he acted as if he did not. During all this time he had looked at her with longing eyes ; her smiles had made him happy, her frowns had made him dejected ; she could have twisted him round her little finger, as Aunt Polly said, if she had only wanted to ; but Hilda was proud, and she carefully preserved the appearance of caring nothing for this man's favor. They had made merry in the pauses of the painting, and they had had long and earnest conversations ; she had fastened the flowers he gave her at her breast, and every day she had mounted the steps of the studio with a beating heart and with the sweet secret hope in her heart : "*To-day—to-day*, he will tell me that he loves me !" But he had never spoken.

And the longer it went on, the more ardent and passionate grew her longing for this moment.

She was tortured by the most varying feelings. If he was gay, she was sure he was in love with some one else and had hopes of a speedy engagement ; if he was out of humor, he must be suffering from the faithlessness of some one he tenderly loved. Then again, if he gave her a book or a flower, if he paid her some compliment on her beauty, if his shining eyes sought hers, she was in a perfect tumult of happiness. On these days she walked home as though she had invisible wings. She wrote absurdly merry letters to her sisters, she hugged and kissed Aunt Polly till she nearly strangled her, and tormented the poor woman with unceasing questions about her picture—whether it was really beautiful,

whether it was like her, and if she did not think it was admirably painted. And on another day, when he had a certain line between his brows, when he was pale and out of temper, and stopped painting every few minutes to stare out of the window so he need not see her eyes or answer her remarks, then she conceived the picture as beneath criticism, called him a mere dauber in her own mind, broke off the sitting before the time was up, and then cried her heart out in her room at home. Then she resolved to write to him the next day that she was sorry, but she should not be able to sit to him ; and she did write something with a trembling hand, only to tear it up again, and after all she went with a pale face and smiling lips. Then when he asked why she looked so ill, if anything was the matter with her, she replied in a tone of surprise : " What should be the matter ? I never was better, and I am as gay as a lark."

Then she forced herself to laugh till the tears ran down her cheeks.

She at length comforted herself with the thought that when the portrait was finished it *must* be settled. She had hoped he would speak to-day ; she had dreamed of it, that to-day . . .

And then a deep blush covered her face, and all her pride was up in arms. She heard again his indifferent tone of the morning, when to her half-jesting words, " I thought it would be finished to-day," he had replied : " You will have to come several times between Christmas and New Year. I will tell you the days by and by—I do not know yet when I shall be back in town."

"You are going away?" she inquired.

"I am going into the country."

"When?"

"To-day."

A half-sob escaped her, but she put her hand instantly to the string of pearls that was fastened closely about her slender throat. "I have a little cough; I think the stove smokes," she said in excuse, and looked at him with such proud eyes that he thought he had better put a dagger into her hand instead of a fan.

Yes, she was proud; she would never show him that she loved him—never! But she could not bear it; that she felt sure of. She was so changed, she cried so easily, she was not so strong as she used to be, she no longer felt such faith in her future, she felt so poor, so small, so disheartened.

Suddenly she started up to get her hat and cloak; she would go to church. But as she stepped out into the hall Aunt Polly was just throwing open the door of the best room, and the brightness of the Christmas-tree blazed out in the darkness.

"Come, quick!" cried the old lady, and there was in her voice the delight that even the oldest people feel at this moment of blessed giving and receiving. "Come, Hilda, you will find all sorts of things from home, too."

And the next moment Hilda was standing before the tree holding a little package in her hand.

"That is from Herr Jussnitz," exclaimed Aunt Polly, triumphantly. "Open it; I am curious to see what is in it. What should you say, Hilda," she

continued in a lower tone, "if there should be a ring inside, a little plain gold ring——"

The slender fingers had quickly torn off the thin paper and opened the little *étui*—three jewels flashed out their colored rays before her. "A brooch!" she said in a disappointed tone, while her aunt almost shrieked with delight.

"The note," cried the old lady; "there is a note too." But it was only a card: "Leo Jussnitz, with kindest regards," the girl read with angry eyes.

Hilda threw the *étui* and the card on the table, caught her hat and cloak off the hook in the hall, and ran out into the street.

She had forgotten her prayer-book, she no longer remembered the church, she only wanted to get out. Outside, the wind had gone down, the sky was clear overhead and bright with stars, and in the streets the last Christmas shoppers were still lingering. With trembling steps Hilda made her way through the crowd, and at length, after wandering a long time, found herself in front of the villa in which Leo's studio was situated. She knew of no other place in the whole great city where she could satisfy her intolerable longing to be alone in some quiet corner in which she need not wear a mask. Only to be for one hour alone, only to be able to cry out once, unheard and unpitied.

She pulled impatiently at the bell, and when the old woman came hurrying out with her lantern, she said she had forgotten something to-day in the studio that she wanted to get at once.

"All right," said the old woman, going to get a lamp.

With a lighted candle Hilda mounted the stairs and unlocked the door of the studio. With the light in her hand she went up to the picture and stood looking at it a long time. At this moment it seemed to her very beautiful; the pale yellow silk gown with the black lace trimming seemed actually to move, so life-like was the figure; the pale face looked smilingly out from beneath the mantilla. She had looked like that a few weeks ago, and he had caught the look on the canvas; but she had forgotten how to smile now.

She turned away, put the candle down on a table, threw herself into the arm-chair by the stove, and stared straight before her. "If he should come now," she said—"if he were to come now, I would ask him if he loved me. Ah, if I could only be sure—only be sure at last!" . . .

"You can't find what you have lost?" said the voice of the old woman, who thought it rather strange that the young girl should stay upstairs so long.

Hilda started up.

"No," she stammered.

"Was it a glove you were looking for?"

Hilda drew her hand across her forehead "Yes," she replied mechanically, "a glove."

"It is downstairs in my room; I will go and get it. You see, this is how it was: When the lady and gentlemen came downstairs this afternoon, I was standing by the door, for I wanted to see the gracious lady; and Herr Jussnitz happened to take out his handkerchief just then, and the glove fell out, a little black woollen glove, and fell just at the

feet of the gracious lady. He stooped down in a great hurry and picked it up, and then he shook his head when the lady looked at him a little surprised. 'How did that come in my pocket?' he said, and laughed, and then he gave the glove to me. 'It must belong to the young lady; will you keep it for her, Frau Kirchner?' he said, and then he went out with his wife and the gentleman. He called back that I was to be sure and make a little fire every day, and the gracious lady gave me two marks because I had taken such good care of her husband."

"The lady—I do not understand you—" came brokenly from the white lips of the young girl.

"It was his wife. Goodness me, you saw her this afternoon. She came to fetch him to Sibyllenburg. She's got a sweet face, hasn't she? The coachman says she is a perfect angel, and he says, too, it is a lovely place, Sibyllenburg, and they have plenty of money—if only they were—But, good gracious, how you look, Fräulein!" she cried, breaking off suddenly.

"I? How do I look? I have a headache—please get me a little water—I cannot go away this minute—it is such a long way—only a few minutes."

Hilda leaned back in her chair with closed eyes. She felt stunned by this blow, but she knew that it was Christmas eve, that she was in the room in which all her hopes had been called into being, in which all her youthful happiness had been awakened. She heard the ticking of the little enamelled clock and the hurried steps of the old woman on the stairs; she saw her own figure on the easel, and she

felt with a frightful conviction that she had just heard the truth, that he to whom she had given her heart had a wife, a young, beautiful, beloved wife, whom he had never mentioned to her.

She gave a short laugh. What business was it of hers whether the artist who was painting her was married or not? What obligation was he under to explain his family connections to her? She was only his *model*!

The small hands closed convulsively over the carved lion's head on the arm of the chair, and her breast heaved with a deep sob. How strange it seemed all at once! She heard the door open, and she stood up on her feet. "I am better now," she said, hoarsely, and drank a little of the water, but then she sank back into her chair. "I should like to sit here quite quietly for a minute or two longer," she said.

The old woman went away and put some fresh coals into her stove downstairs. She shook her head as she did so, and muttered something about the queer ways of these young people, who were all so eccentric nowadays; then she put out the glove in readiness to give it back to its owner, and finally sat down by the stove and twisted a little branch of evergreen about in her hands, which she had broken off in the garden, so she might have a little Christmas feeling, and then she fell asleep.

She awoke with a shiver just as the hoarse cuckoo in her old clock called out nine. It was some time before she remembered that the pretty young lady had come this evening to get her glove—though, really, the old thing was not worth coming all that

long way for. Was she still sitting upstairs? She mounted the stairs, with a yawn, to see if she had gone, and if the candle was still burning.

Yes, there it was, and the girl was still sitting there, looking at her with wide-open, vacant eyes.

"My goodness," cried the old woman, "what are you doing here at this hour, Fräulein? You will get cold; you haven't even a shawl to cover you! You cannot stay here all night—have you quarrelled with your aunt? That wouldn't be surprising, but you see——"

She stopped suddenly, for the gate-bell rang sharply in the quiet night.

"There, didn't I say so? That is your aunt, I am sure, and now there will be a pretty to-do!" she cried, hurrying away.

Hilda did not stir. Aunt Polly might come if she liked. She did not even try to think of an excuse to offer her. It was all the same to her. Then she heard Frau Kirchner's shrill voice coming up the stairs: "This way, please; the steps are so high, and—as I was going to say, she is sitting there as large as life—she forgot her glove and——"

"What! The lovely Spaniard herself—to-night?" cried a clear, laughing woman's voice. "Quick, Nelly, if we should bring the original instead of the copy, we should make a still greater sensation."

Hilda started up at the first words, and her eyes wandered about in search of a way of escape. She had taken two steps toward the door of the adjoining room, when the door opened and two ladies wrapped in furs and veils entered the large, dimly-

lighted room. The smaller of the two rushed straight up to Hilda, who stood gazing helplessly at the intruders, whose appearance here she could by no means understand.

"My dear Fräulein," laughed the little Baroness, "our meeting here has really a rather adventurous aspect, though it is in reality as harmless as possible. This is my cousin, Nelly Benken ; my name is Irene Erlach, and we have come to get your picture. Jussnitz will not let any one see it till it is exhibited in Berlin. Now, you must know I am one of those persons whom contradiction only makes more determined ; so I declared I would have my way, and offered to lay a wager that I and all the others should see his beautiful Spanish girl before to-morrow morning. Then I sent for the carriage and took myself off quietly with Nelly. We were going to carry off the picture, and lo ! we have found the original. My dear Fräulein," she continued, with crimson cheeks, "do be obliging for once and come with us yourself. You will be doing us the greatest favor—it would be the most delightful surprise."

Hilda measured the speaker, who had grasped her arm, from head to foot with a long, cool look.

"Good Heavens, Nelly, do help me to persuade her !" cried the Baroness, in a complaining tone. "Do come my dear Fräulein—may I ask your name ?"

"Von Zweidorf," said Hilda, proudly.

"Please, dear Fräulein von Zweidorf"—the vivacious young woman wore a rather surprised expression for a moment—"come with us ; you will be under my protection. Only think how surprised all

my friends will be when I win my wager in such a delightful fashion."

"Please, please, Fräulein von Zweidorf," joined in the young girl with the fresh, piquant face, in which might be plainly read the desire to carry out the joke which her cousin had proposed.

"I am not prepared for a large company. I am a stranger to you all. I——"

"Ah, that is nothing; there are not more than thirty persons in all, all good friends together. You will find Jussnitz with his wife——"

Hilda gave a start. His wife! A burning desire to meet this wife of his in his presence overcame her.

"But I am not dressed!" she stammered out.

"No matter. We will help you out, won't we, Nelly? Your things will do well enough. It is a pity that you haven't your Spanish costume——"

"It is here in the next room," said Hilda.

The little Baroness clapped her hands for pleasure. "Oh, that is delightful; we will have all manner of fun this evening. Go, quick, and put on your costume! Nelly," she said, turning eagerly to her companion, "it will be a capital joke. Can't we have a little more light?" And she opened the door and called out through the deserted house for another lamp; then she pushed Hilda into the next room. "Remember that we have a good long drive before us, and be as quick as you can, I beg of you."

The sleepy old woman brought her lamp, and Frau von Erlach rushed with it into the room where Hilda was changing her dress with trembling hands.

The young lady in the studio heard from within the rustling of silk, the low crackling of the Spanish jacket, and the hurried movements of the two women. And when in a few minutes Hilda appeared in the doorway her dazzling beauty almost took her breath away. But the Baroness walked straight up to the easel with the lamp. "Look here, Nelly, quick," she cried.

They were both silent, and Nelly looked disappointed.

"Mediocre, isn't it?" whispered the Baroness in French. Hilda did not hear it. Then she wrapped the charming Spanish girl up in her cloak, and dragged her out of the house, laughing and jesting.

Frau Kirchner ran behind them with the lantern, shaking her head. "They can take her with them if they like," she muttered to herself, "but the picture is another thing. I wouldn't have let them have that." And as the carriage rolled away in the darkness, she looked after it discontentedly.

"It may be all very fine, all their mummary on Christmas eve, but I pity a woman who has to laugh at such mad pranks."

And she thought as she went back, of a pair of clear, childlike woman's eyes, which looked with an expression of indescribable anxiety at the little black glove that had fallen out of her husband's pocket.

"It's a nice sort of thing they have in hand, I make no doubt," she muttered again, and with a vigorous jerk she turned the key in the lock.



CHAPTER IX.

THE celebration which the Baroness Erlach had planned could not take place at her cousin's haunted castle. The old chimneys and stoves, which had not been used for a half-century or more, refused to do their duty when a trial of them was made, happily in good season, and the foreman who was called in recommended extensive repairs which would take several weeks to complete. So Herr von Barrenberg was obliged to convey to his cousin the dismal tidings that to his infinite regret he could not receive his guests at Barrenberg, but he begged they would spend the evening in his apartments in the city instead.

After all, it was not a great misfortune. After Irene von Erlach had pouted for half a minute, she rushed headlong into a hundred plans for the celebration, and promised her "little cousin"—he measured about six feet two—to conscientiously fulfil her duties as hostess. She had all manner of fantastic ideas for the decoration of the salon, and began to consider who should be invited; for the practical cousin, who only opened his rooms to the families of his friends on compulsion, now that he was "in for it," wished to extend invitations to some people to whom he was indebted. Irene

chose some charming little presents for him, promised to provide a magnificent Christmas-tree and a "live" Christmas angel, drove with him to the pastry-cook's, and thought of every smallest detail, so that at last Barrenberg himself began to enjoy the fun, and at five o'clock precisely on Christmas eve received his guests at the door of his large and elegant bachelor establishment with the quiet, good-natured smile that made his tall, somewhat clumsy person so attractive.

Beside him stood Frau von Erlach in a white silk gown, trimmed with marabout feathers, above whose airy down the dark, brilliant face looked more charming than ever. Behind her laughed and whispered two charming blond young girls, Melly and Nelly von Benken, nieces of Barrenberg, whom he had begged of his sister for this evening. They were under the care of the little Baroness, and had permission to enjoy the pleasures of the capital and the hospitality of the Baroness until the first of January. The two girls, who looked absurdly alike, made their most graceful courtesies, which still had a lingering flavor of the dancing-class, graduating them to suit the rank of the guest, and all with the most solemn faces, which did not prevent them from putting their heads together immediately afterward and giggling. Some of these people were really too funny! There were the former comrades of their uncle, the merry Lieutenant von Osten conspicuous among them; then an asthmatic old colonel's wife in green velvet, who stared at one through her eye-glass for half an hour at a time; then there was the wonderfully elegant Frau Siegs-

feld, the widow of a hunting friend ; then a young man in an impossible civilian's dress, whose cravat was much too red, and his young wife much too pretty for him. He was a pianist, from whom their uncle took lessons.

"Just think of our good old uncle playing on the piano with those paws of his" whispered Melly to Nelly.

There was a celebrated actress, who thought it was a "perfectly splendid idea" to invite her to a Christmas-eve party, who, waving her feather fan and giving out a strong odor of the latest perfume, planted herself before her own picture, which in a red velvet frame hung over a small divan, and turning up her eyes with an expression Nelly tried in vain to imitate afterward, considered dear Barrenberg's devotion quite touching.

There was a General von So-and-so, with his wife and four daughters, the youngest of whom numbered thirty summers, and who all had long white faces with pale lips, numberless freckles, and red hair. Their two brothers, at home on their vacation, accompanied them, being always on the lookout for a rich wife, losing no opportunity of finding one, and doubly on the alert this evening, for the two Benkens, in addition to all their charms of person, had the great advantage of being Barrenberg's presumptive heiresses—at least such was the report. The fact that Barrenberg was only forty years old was not taken into consideration ; he was sure not to marry, out of pure good-nature.

The young ladies put on a rather haughty air when the two officers greeted them, and received

very coldly the striking cordiality of the four sisters.

"A nice match that would be," exclaimed Nelly. As some one else came in just then, Melly nudged Nelly and said : "Oh, look, Nell—" But they both involuntarily made a low courtesy as their uncle said : "My two nieces, Frau Jussnitz."

The two pairs of clear girlish eyes looked at Antje as she entered on her husband's arm, and at the sight of that soft, womanly face, which they found so agreeable among all the others, they forgot their harmless mockery.

"Did you see, she has been crying?" whispered Nelly to Melly. The latter nodded assent, and they both looked after the young wife, whose long, dark brown velvet train was just disappearing through the door of the adjoining room.

"It is wonderful," said the Baroness, in a low tone, to her cousin, "what an atmosphere of boredom that woman carries about with her. You ought not to have teased Jussnitz so frightfully to bring her—especially as she hates to come herself."

"Why, Irene !"

"Hush, cousin ! She is in the way here if we want to have any fun."

Nelly thrust her little head between her uncle and aunt.

"I think she is charming," she said emphatically, "and now I am going to find her and see if she is really such a bore."

Nelly carried out her resolution, but she soon came back with a disappointed look and joined her sister, who was talking with Lieutenant Osten.

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"Hush, cousin! She is in the way here if we want to have any fun."

Nelly thrust her little head between her uncle and aunt.

“ Oh, dear,” she said, with a pretty air of wisdom. “ all is not gold that glitters.”

While the rest of the company moved gayly about in Barrenberg’s elegant rooms, Antje sat quite alone at a little marble table, turning over the leaves of a hunting-album. She would so gladly have remained at home. but she had no good reason to give for such a desire. Her mother was no longer at Sibyllenburg—she was sitting all alone in the old manor-house at home—and her child was still so small. Antje had had a tree for her in the afternoon when she came back from the city ; and before it was time to come here, the child had grown tired of its play and had gone to sleep, so there was no need of her remaining at home.

So here she was, even lonelier than her absent mother, with her sad, heavy heart. She did not hear the laughter and talking about her, she did not see the throng of people. She turned over the leaves of her book and still saw nothing but the picture that had presented itself to her eyes this morning—a lovely girlish face, a pair of little hands putting her hat straight on her dark, silky hair, and—one hand gloveless. Then she saw Leo again, and saw a tiny glove which had fallen out of his pocket, and heard his short, embarrassed words : “ How did it get there ? ”

Antje was foolish, very foolish ! She scolded herself for it, and yet she could not put these thoughts out of her mind nor keep them from dwelling on that trifling circumstance. She wished she might have *one* friend she could call her own, to whom she could confide the thoughts that tortured

her, and who would scold her and say: "Antje, how can you harbor such dreadful suspicions?"

If she could only get up courage enough to speak to Leo himself! But her heart failed her whenever she imagined herself saying: "Leo, don't be angry with me; I am so anxious—I—laugh at me if you like, but I really believe I am—a little bit jealous of the little Spanish girl—only assure me once that it is all nonsense——"

She blushed crimson at the very thought; her hands shook and her heart throbbed as if she had been caught committing a crime.

"I wanted to hear, Frau Antje," said Maiberg's voice close beside her; "I have never had a chance before to ask you what Leo said about the sale of his picture."

She looked up at him in surprise. "Has he heard of it yet?"

"Oh, yes; this morning."

Antje felt her heart stand still for a moment, and her eyes grew large and fixed.

"He did not mention it to me," came hoarsely from her lips.

Maiberg hated himself for having asked the question. He was the picture of confusion as he stood before the young wife.

"Oh, he will be sure to tell you," he forced himself to say in a playful tone; "perhaps he wishes to surprise you with the news. But there is the bell; the tree must be ready. It is such a curious idea to collect a miscellaneous herd of people around you on such a night. I had looked forward to such a very different Christmas."

She made no reply. She had resumed her air of an automaton as she walked beside him to the great salon, where a brilliant tree sparkled. Maiberg, who was observing her secretly, was almost shocked at the expression of her eyes. She stood there among the others and heard the playful poem which Melly Benken recited, standing on a dais in the character of an angel with great white wings. But Antje only heard the sound of the words, she did not take in their sense. A little later her fingers closed over some small object which the angel had put into her hand ; she murmured her thanks almost unconsciously. These words were going over and over in her mind : “ He tells me nothing—nothing ! I do not possess his confidence. I am nothing to him now, nothing—perhaps I *never* was ! ” And then she felt an indescribable longing for her mother, for the past, for the peace of her youth. In the midst of all this laughter and talking and merriment she could see herself entering that cosey room at home to take refuge in her mother’s arms, crying : “ Mother, here I am come back to you again ! ”

“ Leonie will like this,” said a voice in her ear, and Maiberg smilingly held out a droll little rubber doll, which the Christmas angel had just put into his hand.

Leonie ! Her little child ! The spell was broken ; she looked gratefully at the speaker.

“ That is right,” he said, praising her. “ What did you get ? ”

They both looked down at a little ivory spinning-wheel and read the inscription on the card :

“A wife who knows how to cook and to spin
Will make her husband the happiest of men.”

Antje smiled; it was the Baroness's handwriting, and Antje knew her opinion of the “housewife fad,” as she called it.

The gayety of the company had been stimulated by the champagne. Maiberg stood and sat beside Antje as if mounting guard over her. Leo Jussnitz had received a doll dressed as a Spaniard, accompanied by a malicious verse which he tore up. Presently he approached his wife.

“Excuse me, Antje,” he said, taking Maiberg by the arm. When he was out of hearing, he said: “Pray, do not keep forever by the side of my wife, or she will never learn self-reliance. And, besides, the Baroness is malicious.”

“I cannot see how your wife and I can arouse her malice.”

“I just heard her—but no matter! Besides, the Baroness is in a frightful temper; she just now insisted that I should exhibit my picture of the Spanish girl here this evening. Who on earth can have put that into her head?”

“Send for it, then,” replied the doctor, carelessly.

Leo's face flushed crimson. “I *will* not.”

“But why should you be so mysterious about your work?” inquired Maiberg. “This morning you were almost angry with your wife and me because we came to your studio, and would have been quite angry if we had found the young girl upstairs with you.”

“I never like to be disturbed, least of all by Antje.”

"H'm !"

"What ?"

"I only thought—I say, Leo, who is this pretty girl ?"

"A fellow-countrywoman of mine from Altwedel, the daughter of one of our neighbors. I knew her when she was four years old. She is pretty, certainly, or I should not be painting her."

"Your wife and she both looked as if they had never heard of one another."

"It is not necessary that they should. I am painting the girl, and that is all there is about it."

"Leo," whispered Maiberg, drawing his reluctant friend into the embrasure of a window, "take this as it is meant, as the warning of a true friend—don't begin another romance like that early one!"

"What do you mean ?" flashed out Jussnitz.

"Tell me, Leo, does that little girl know that you are married ?"

"Why should she ? I have not told her all my private affairs. I refrained purposely, for then I could not have avoided introducing her to Antje, and I do not wish to do that ; you know very well why."

"Why, Leo, you are the most unconscionable fellow in the world ! Has it never occurred to you that in your daily intercourse with a child like that, who has only just put her head out of the home-nest, a——"

"Well, what ?" asked Jussnitz.

"That she might conceive an unlucky attachment to you, for one thing ?"

"But the announcement of my marriage would not guard her against that."

"I would not be sure of that, my friend," returned Maiberg.

"Well, then, let her inquire me up before she bestows her heart on me," replied Jussnitz, peevishly, turning his back on his friend, and bending down to the Baroness, who held out her hand authoritatively, saying :

"Will you lay a wager with me that to-morrow I can tell you exactly how large your picture is that you are painting now, the pose of your Spanish girl, and the color of her lace-trimmed skirt? Will you bet, Herr Jussnitz?"

"I could not possibly make a bet which I am perfectly certain you would lose."

"I shall not lose."

"Very well, then. At what hour to-morrow shall I hear this, Baroness?"

"Fix the hour yourself."

"At six, then," he said, with a smile.

"Done! Your hand upon it."

"What is the prize?" inquired Barrenberg, coming up to them.

"Oh, some nice little present," replied the Baroness with a smile. "What do you say, Jussnitz, to a copy of the picture? Yes, we will make it that."

And then the little white figure disappeared among the throng of guests. Some one in the next room began to play a Strauss waltz, and the next moment Nelly Benken danced past with Lieutenant Osten, and the others joined in with all the ardor of youth.

An hour might have passed when the music broke off suddenly in the midst of a waltz. Antje, who had sat down beside the loquacious old colonel's wife, who was relating the sad story of the death of three husbands, paid no heed to her neighbor's words, which simply sounded in her ears like the murmur of a fountain. Suddenly the lady in green velvet stopped speaking, and the hurried, agitated tone of the Baroness came to them from the next room.

"Pray, my friends, all come in here ; the young people are going to give us some *tableaux vivants*—only a few, and they will be given quickly before supper."

The old lady put her arm into Antje's.

'Come, Frau Jussnitz, let us go together, or—are you going to appear too ? Then of course——"

"No," said Antje, walking on beside her.

In the next room they had closed the wide folding-door which opened into a third room. The young girls and some of the gentlemen were in there, and sounds of laughing and giggling were heard occasionally. A servant was placing chairs opposite the door, for the spectators, among whom were Mai-berg and Jussnitz. In the front row sat Antje between the colonel's wife and the young and elegant widow of Barrenberg's hunting-friend, who declared quite frankly that these improvised tableaux and charades, so far as her experience went, were generally very poor.

"Don't you think so, too ?" she asked Antje.

"I have seen very few," Antje replied.

"I envy you," sighed the beautiful widow.

"Here in society we are absolutely flooded with them."

The folding-doors opened and displayed first a Christmas scene, in which Melly again played her part as angel.

Then came a Lorelei, who sat on the arm of a sofa, whence she looked down at Lieutenant Osten, who was rowing about in a great old German chest. Nelly Benken's golden hair was charmingly effective and procured for the picture a loud "Bravo!"

"Spanish Dancer, after Jussnitz!" now announced the little Baroness.

Jussnitz shrugged his shoulders with a smile and looked at Maiberg. "It is too—" But what he was going to say can never be known, for there stood——

An universal murmur of admiration passed through the room ; then a pause of admiring attention. Only Antje turned her eyes from the girlish figure and looked across at her husband. He had his head bent forward and was gazing at the lovely face with a look of surprise and delight.

Hilda's slim figure was thrown up by a background of dark-leaved plants. She stood on a slight elevation, in the same pose as in the picture, her left hand in the folds of her pale yellow gown, the fan in her right. The upper part of her figure was half bent backwards, and she displayed to the spectator her beautiful face, with the dark, veiled, seductive eyes. The little white teeth gleamed out between the rosy, smiling lips. She stood quite motionless ; only her ear-rings shook slightly and showed with how much difficulty she kept herself quiet.

Slowly the folding-doors closed, and then there came a burst of applause. For the moment compliments were showered on the Baroness, who was besieged with questions ; but she seemed to have no time to listen to them. She rushed up to Jussnitz.

“ Help me to persuade Fräulein von Zweidorf to stay to supper ; she says she will not ! ”

He followed her mechanically. “ Baroness,” he said, “ why did you do this ? ”

She thrust him, without speaking, into the room where Hilda had sunk exhausted into a chair.

“ Thank you, it will be better for me to go,” she replied curtly to the renewed persuasions of the Baroness. “ My aunt will be expecting me ; please let me go.”

“ You are right, Fräulein von Zweidorf,” said Jussnitz, coming up to her. “ I will escort you home. How in the world did you happen to come here to—play this *rôle* in a circle where you know no one ? ”

The young girl looked at him defiantly and was silent.

“ Don’t spoil sport, Jussnitz,” exclaimed Barrenberg. “ I must say it is a queer sort of thing for you to carry Fräulein von Zweidorf off now.”

And taking him aside he added : “ Don’t you understand that my cousin will be suspected of smuggling into the house a beauty who is not presentable, and that would be very unpleasant for me for the sake of my guests ? ” And then he turned to Hilda with an air of decision, offered her his arm, and said : “ Allow me to present you to my guests.”

During this scene Antje had been standing in the midst of a circle of curious spectators.

"Pray, Frau Jussnitz, why did you not introduce us to this new star?" inquired Lieutenant von Osten.

"Is she a relative of yours?" inquired the actress.

"Good Heavens, what surprises the Baroness does get up! Were you in the plot, Frau Jussnitz?" cried another.

"Oh, it was only a joke such as our good Baroness loves," said the beautiful widow, shrugging her shoulders. "Who cares how she brought it about? Perhaps it is her dressmaker, or something of that sort."

The general's four daughters nodded at each other significantly, as if to confirm what had just been said. But Melly Benken said quite frankly that probably papa would not like it very well if he knew Nelly had been helping Cousin Erlach to carry out a practical joke.

"Papa was so opposed to our coming," she concluded, "and now we shall catch it! I hope uncle will take the Spanish girl back where Irene got her from as fast as possible."

Antje was perfectly silent. From her silence people naturally concluded that she, too, thought there was something wrong.

Then the circle opened, and Hilda von Zweidorf appeared on Barrenberg's arm, pale, agitated, holding her head rigidly erect; and her costume at this moment had a coquettish, theatrical air.

Antje held her fan tightly clasped in both hands, and again the eyes of these two met, as they had

done this morning, in a long, searching look, and then Leo whispered in his wife's ear : " I entreat you to befriend this young girl ! "

" Do not do it ! Do not do it ! " a voice cried within her. " Turn your back on her, and she will be harmless for all time ! "

For one moment, one short moment, she stood facing Hilda, with her head thrown proudly back ; she could see the peculiar glances which the guests cast at the young girl, saw how Osten fixed his monocle impertinently in his eye, and how the colonel's wife put up her lorgnette—and the next moment Antje went forward a few steps to meet Hilda and grasped her hand.

" I am delighted to see you again this evening, my dear Fräulein von Zweidorf. You have given us all, and especially my husband and myself, a charming surprise—hasn't she, Leo ? "

She turned to her husband as she spoke, blushing at her falsehood.

He declared that he agreed with her entirely and announced that he had known Fräulein von Zweidorf ever since she was so high—measuring with his hand about half a yard from the floor.

The two ladies were still standing hand in hand, but Hilda's eyes had drooped before the young wife's glance. At length the servant who announced supper created a diversion.

Jussnitz and Osten presented themselves to Hilda at the same moment, each offering an arm, Jussnitz with an air of nervousness, Osten with that eager chivalry which prompts kind-hearted men to expiate a wrong, even though only in thought.

Hilda did not lift her eyes ; she made a step backwards and caught blindly at an arm that had not been offered. Maiberg looked down in surprise at the little hand which touched his arm. Then he smiled, placed it carefully on his black coat sleeve, and walked beside its owner, who moved timidly on toward the dining-room. Osten followed close behind, in order to get a place near her at least.

Jussnitz sat next to the Baroness ; she looked at him slyly out of her dark eyes.

"You have done Fräulein von Zweidorf no kindness," he said shortly.

"Bah !" she replied, loudly, turning from him and looking at Antje. "A man must not keep everything for himself, my dear Jussnitz. Tell me, Frau Jussnitz, where did your husband keep Fräulein von Zweidorf hidden away ? Have you secret chambers at Sibyllenburg ?"

"You ought to know yourself, my dear Baroness," replied Antje, "as you brought the young lady here."

The Baroness laughed until the tears came into her eyes.

"Ask her to tell you where I discovered her."

Antje made no reply. She talked to her next neighbor, but she felt as if the room were whirling round with her, so that she did not know what she said or did. Only one thing was clear to her—that she must on no account let that woman see what was going on in her mind.

The supper seemed endless, and gay and mirthful as the whole company was, neither Antje nor Hilda could join in the merriment. Hilda was suffering

as much as Antje. Good Heavens, what a whirlwind she had brought about her ears !

At last, at last, the last ice was eaten, the crackers were all pulled, and people began to push back their chairs. Antje slipped unperceived into the cloak-room and sent a servant to call her husband.

He came, fretful and cross.

"You wish to go?" he inquired.

"Yes," she replied.

"But first I must accompany Fräulein von Zweidorf home."

"You?"

"Who else is there?"

"Very well," she said, firmly; "but you must allow me to drive there with you, Leo, and then to go straight home, for it is impossible for me to stay here any longer."

He gave a short laugh. "If it is any pleasure to you," he said, "I will invite Maiberg too to join us in this excursion."

She blushed suddenly. She had not been moved by jealousy at that moment; she had thought of nothing but getting away as soon as possible.

In a few minutes they were sitting in the landau. Antje could still feel the soft, caressing touch of the Baroness, at parting, on her arm. "It is really wonderfully nice of you, Frau Jussnitz, to act such a motherly part toward that little girl," she had said.

They drove in silence through the quiet streets, which seemed endless. Then the clocks began to strike twelve, one after another—it was Christmas morning.

"And peace on earth!" murmured Antje, and

she felt for her husband's hand, and laid her hot, slender fingers in it. Only one hearty pressure, and all would have been well. But there was no response. He passively submitted, and that was all. Slowly she drew her hand away.

Hilda, on the seat beside her, did not stir till the carriage stopped before Aunt Polly's little dwelling.

Leo sprang out quickly and helped the young girl to descend.

Upstairs there was still a light in the sitting-room, and as Leo pulled the bell, a window was thrown up in the best parlor.

"Is it you?" called out the voice of Frau Berger, scarcely recognizable for agitation.

"Yes, aunt."

"Indeed! Well, then, you can just go straight back to where you came from! It is all over between us two, and—you may like to know that a letter to your father is already on the way."

"Aunt!" shrieked the young girl in horror.

But the window was closed violently upstairs, and the light put out.

Leo Jussnitz shrugged his shoulders.

"What is to be done about it?" he said. "Aunt Polly is very angry. Get in again and come to Sibyllenburg with us."

Antje had put her head out of the carriage window. "For Heaven's sake, what sort of people are they that she belongs to?" went through her mind. She could see the young girl now pulling desperately at the bell.

"Aunt! Aunt!" her trembling voice sounded through the silent night.

"Her people will not let her in, it seems," said Maiberg calmly.

"Then give it up. My wife will be very glad to have you go home with us," they heard Leo's voice saying outside. "You see we cannot possibly make an uproar here in the middle of the night."

Antje moved silently over to the other side of the carriage, and the next moment the girl's trembling figure sank down among the cushions beside her, sobbing with anger and mortification.

"Your aunt, no doubt, was anxious about you, and that was enough, in a person of her temperament, to account for her hardness," said Jussnitz, comfortingly. "I will write to her to-morrow or go and see her myself ; and for the present you will be our guest."

The coachman drove home at a furious pace. It had grown colder, and light frost-flowers began to appear on the window-panes, made visible as they dashed by a street lamp. Inside the carriage the air presently grew so close that Maiberg without ceremony let down a window half-way. Antje had drawn herself close into a corner and drew her cloak tightly round her.

Who was this who was to be admitted into the sanctuary of her home, who was to live in the rooms that belonged to her ? What would her child's clear eyes be compelled to witness ?

Her whole frame shook as she crossed the threshold of her child's room.

"Merciful Heavens !" cried old Classen, who had been sitting with the child, "how you do look !"

Antje had thrown off her furs as she entered the warm, dimly-lighted room of her darling and knelt down beside the sleeping child.

"You had better go to bed," said the old woman ; "you are feverish, gracious lady."

"Yes, presently, dear Classen ; only first I will—go and find Minna ; we must get a room ready—we have a visitor."

"My gracious ! It must be two o'clock !"

"Yes, but it happens so—" And Antje got out her key-basket and went downstairs to the clothes-press. She heard Leo's voice in the dining-room ; it sounded loud and angry.

"I did not think you could be so thoughtless, Hildegard," he was saying. "What did you mean by it ? Did you wish to make me angry ? What could it be ? And now see what a position you have put yourself in, and me, too !"

Antje went to the door and opened it a little.

"Please do not speak so loud, Leo," she said, quietly.

Hilda was sitting with a pale but smiling face on the edge of a chair, twisting her handkerchief about in her hands. "It was a joke," she said, shrugging her shoulders.

"You must have a little patience, Fräulein von Zweidorf," said Antje, turning to the young girl. "Your room is not warmed yet, but it will soon be ready."

And she gave the linen to the housemaid, bidding her make haste, and promised to provide Hilda with some clothes until her own could be sent for. Afterward she herself showed her guest to her

rose room, wishing her a comfortable night in the presence of the maid.

There was no rest or comfort for her. She lay wide awake the whole long night, listening to the moaning of the wind and the creaking of the branches of the tall trees outside, and to the restless pacing to and fro of her husband in the adjoining room. If he had come to her then and spoken kindly with her about what had happened, how gladly would she have believed all he might have said ; but even now he did not make the slightest attempt at an explanation.

He had declared that he was not sleepy, but Antje knew that it was only because he wished to evade a discussion. She could hear him at length throw himself on a sofa, and after a while, when he thought she had gone to sleep, he came in. Her hand quivered ; she would so gladly have stretched it out to him and said : " Have confidence in me, Leo ; do not let us go on like this." But she could not get up her courage.

Neither did Hilda sleep. She felt as if she would like to cry, but no tears came. She seemed to have grown so poor on this Christmas eve. She felt outraged and humiliated to the last degree, and she hated the woman who occupied the place that ought to be hers.

The Baroness had told her niece about it in the carriage as they were driving away from the studio. She had spoken French, thinking that Hilda could not understand—she, whose mother was a Frenchwoman. She said this woman was an utter non-entity, and it was incomprehensible how such a

charming man as Jussnitz could ever have chosen her. Of course he had expiated his folly, for they were miserable together. Any one could see how her Dutch phlegm, combined with the narrowest and silliest views, made him nervous to his very finger-tips. The only thing which still bound him to his wife was her money—poor fellow !

“Poor fellow!” Hilda said, now half-aloud, wringing her trembling hands. Then, however, she clenched her hand and cried with a sob : “Oh, he is base, he is wicked ! Oh, what a silly, silly girl I have been !” And she shrank from the sound of her own voice.





CHAPTER X.

"FRÄULEIN VON ZWEIDORF has a headache," announced the housemaid the next morning, as the family assembled in the dining-room rather later than usual for breakfast.

Antje sent to inquire what she would have sent to her, coffee or tea. The answer came back that Fräulein von Zweidorf did not care for anything.

Antje had just made the tea and was filling the cups for Dr. Maiberg and Leo. She was standing by the table on which the silver urn was placed, in a very simple morning-dress of soft white woollen, and the winter sun which came through the windows in a broad stream surrounded the white figure with a dazzling radiance. She had had her back turned to the gentlemen, but now she came across the room and took her seat between them.

"Hadn't you better go and look after Fräulein von Zweidorf?" said Leo, impatiently. "She seems to be ill."

"I have already been to see her," replied his wife. "She is not ill, she only seems greatly excited. I could get no answer to all my questions, except that she wished her things sent for from her aunt's, for she wished to go away by the next train."

"Go away?" inquired Leo, crushing his toast between his fingers. "Where?"

"To her parents, she said."

"That is delightful for me and my picture," he exclaimed. "And what did you say, if I may ask?"

"I tried to persuade her to make her peace with her aunt first——"

Jussnitz frowned.

"But she was exceedingly indignant at the very idea," continued Antje; "called her aunt a low, vulgar person, who had insulted her shamefully, and asked me for a pen and ink to write to her father."

"I will go and see the worthy Aunt Polly, by-and-by," exclaimed Leo. "Hilda is right; she cannot go back to her—she certainly was not much above the grade of a washerwoman in her behavior last night. But Fräulein von Zweidorf must *not* go away for all that, for my picture must not suffer for her childish folly. So, pray, have the goodness, Antje, to go up to her and invite her to remain as our guest until—well, we will see about that. I will drive in town in about an hour. Will you come too, Maiberg? Well, Antje, I should like to have an answer."

Antje had looked beyond him; the silver teaspoon in her hand shook slightly.

"Yes," she replied at length, when Leo had stopped speaking.

"Of course you must not mention the picture as the chief reason," he continued, in a warning voice; "you need only say how glad we shall be to keep her here for a while. Do you understand?"

This time Antje made no reply. She rose, took her key-basket, and left the room.

"Your wife looks very pale," remarked Wolf.

"She always does when anything does not suit her. I have accustomed myself not to notice it." And Leo took up the newspaper, and taking a comfortable whiff at his cigar, he added : "It's a queer sort of thing—I can't imagine how women can invent so many different ways of making themselves disagreeable. This practical joke of the Baroness was got up for Antje's especial benefit. Well, this time she got herself out of the difficulty tolerably well."

"Tolerably well? She acted like a brave, true woman, as she is," returned Maiberg, giving his cup an angry push as he spoke.

He recalled Leo's words last evening, begging him not to keep so continually beside Antje, and he flushed involuntarily. Then he got up. "If you don't mind," he said, very quietly, "I will not go to Dresden with you."

"Why not? We were going to lunch with Barrenberg at the English Garden."

"Thank you; I really have no desire to plunge into a crowd of strangers so soon again." And with a very grave look in his blue eyes he, too, took up a newspaper, seated himself by the window, and began to read.

At this moment Antje came in.

"Well?" called out Leo.

"She will stay with us, Leo."

"Ah, really!" he said, carelessly, folding up his napkin, quite contrary to his usual custom, as he remarked : "Then I will finish the picture *here*."

Antje busied herself about the table; she appar-

ently had not heard her husband's words. Then she again took up her key-basket to go about her household duties. At the door she turned and said : "Fräulein von Zweidorf wishes to speak with you, Leo, before you go to Dresden. She is waiting for you in my sitting-room upstairs. I shall go to church by-and-by. You will be back in time for dinner, I suppose, for I do not like to give the servants their presents without you."

He muttered something that sounded like assent, and she disappeared.

"Classen," she said, downstairs in the kitchen, "the young lady will stay here for some time."

The old woman looked searchingly at her mistress, but she could not tell from that calm face whether this visit was a pleasure or a burden to her.

"Very good," she said, "but I wouldn't keep an actress like yon in my house."

"She is not an actress, Classen," replied Antje, wearily, looking up from the great Christmas *stollen* on which she was mechanically affixing the scrap of paper with the name of the recipient. "She is an old friend of my husband's, and he is painting her because she is so pretty."

"His friend? What does he want of a friend when he has got a wife like you?" she muttered to herself, beginning to shove her great pots and pans about angrily. "It is all very well to be good and submissive, but to be *too* good and *too* submissive is—" The rest was swallowed out of the respect which she felt for her young mistress. "*She* will suffer for her goodness yet!" she sighed, looking after Antje.

Antje began to change her dress in her own room, as she was going to church. She did not observe that the door of her little rococo salon was not quite closed. She felt in a hurry, for it was a long way, and she wished to walk there in the fresh winter air—and, moreover, she did not wish to keep Maiberg waiting, who had begged to be allowed to accompany her.

Suddenly her husband's voice sounded in her ear :
"Christmas has brought me something, too, Hilda——"

A long pause ensued, and then he spoke again, so slowly and distinctly that not the slightest *nuance* escaped his young wife. "I have sold a picture in Berlin—what do you say to that, Hilda? Hilda, are you not glad for me? You usually take so much interest in my painting. I wanted to tell you of it yesterday, but you were so indifferent, so freezing, that I—you must not be like that again, child; it hurts me. Tell me, are you not glad?"

"Oh, of course I am glad. I congratulate you upon your success," was the icy response.

"Hilda! Good Heavens, Hilda!" These few words sounded unspeakably tender to Antje's ears; she felt that no one could speak like that unless he felt it in the depths of his soul. "Hilda, do not take that tone; it is not true, it is not real!"

Antje suddenly leaned for support against her toilet-table; her delicate, pale face looked actually distorted at this moment. Yes, here it was in reality, all she had feared—the proof that *she*, his wife, was nothing more to him. She forcibly kept back

the sobs that threatened to choke her, then she rushed across to the nursery and threw herself on her knees beside her child.

“Mousie !” she gasped out, pressing the little golden head against her breast—“Mousie, it must not be, it cannot be ; we will defend ourselves, Mouse, we will defend ourselves !” And with quivering lips she repeated once more : “We will defend ourselves, we will not give up papa !”

And as the little one, frightened by its mother’s unusual violence, began to cry, she comforted the child in her softest tones, but she still kept repeating her single phrase : “We will not give up papa ; no, no !”

“Not give up—papa !” repeated the little one, the large tears still standing on her cheeks—“not give up dear papa !”





CHAPTER XI.

AUNT POLLY did not go to bed at all that Christmas eve. The little body did not begin to realize the effect of her words until it became quite quiet outside, and the bell was not pulled a third time by the repentant sinner, as she had confidently expected. After waiting in vain for a quarter of an hour, she softly opened the window and listened, but she could hear nothing. She called out in a harsh voice : " Are you still there ? "

There was no reply.

" Hilda ! " she cried again, harshly at first, then more gently and excitedly. " Answer me, I say ; don't be so obstinate in addition to everything else. "

All was still.

Then the old woman crept downstairs with a beating heart, the door-key in her hand, and carefully unlocked the door.

" Hilda ! " The street was lonely and deserted.

" Good Heavens ! " murmured Aunt Polly, as she shut the door again and stood quite dumfounded in the cold, dark entry, reeking with the odor of vegetables. " Good Heavens ! where can she be ? If she should have done anything desperate, out of fear of her father—if she should have jumped into the Elbe—— "

Aunt Polly was in a state of nervous terror ; she groped her way to the bedroom of the grocery-woman and knocked.

“Frau Hernicke, open the door ; something has happened.”

The stout grocer-woman appeared with a lamp in her hand, quite startled.

“Good gracious, my dear Frau Berger, what is the matter ?”

Aunt Polly was as pale as a ghost.

“Frau Hernicke,” she stammered, “my Hilda is gone—only think of it ! She ran off just after the Christmas-tree, and left me sitting there, half-dead with anxiety, till twelve o’clock, and when at last she rang the bell I was angry, and I called down to her that she might just go back where she came from. She took it in dudgeon, and now she is gone. If she only hasn’t jumped into the Elbe, because I said I had written to her father. Ah, what an unlucky woman I am ! What shall I do now ?”

“Why, I say, my dear Frau Berger, that really wasn’t right of you. Good Heavens, she is sure to have jumped in——”

Aunt Polly shook all over as the woman good-naturedly continued : “Well, I don’t know anything else to do now but just to wait till they find her. People who are drowned never come to the surface till three days after. Come, dear Frau Berger, don’t take on so. I will make you a cup of tea, and that will quiet you down a bit. Ah, dearie me, what trouble children do make for a body !”

“But, Frau Berger,” now cried a boy’s voice from

the shop itself, where the huckster-woman's eldest son slept, "don't you be worried about her. The young lady drove away with the gentleman who used to come to you sometimes——"

"Oh, mercy on us!" screamed Aunt Polly. "I would rather she had jumped into the river! Oh, what a miserable creature I am! Now her parents will say I drove her to her ruin!"

"Was it a droschky?" the huckster-woman asked her son.

"No; it was a fine private carriage, and I knew the coachman, too. His name is Bormann; he used to be with Herr Lehrbeck, and now he is at Sibyllenburg."

"Sibyllenburg?" gasped Aunt Polly, "Sibyllenburg? Who lives there? I must go there to-morrow. Is it very far? How shall I get there?"

Thereupon both mother and son gave a detailed description of the situation of Sibyllenburg and the way to get there, and each contradicted the other. At last Aunt Polly only knew that a train started for that place at eight o'clock, and then she would have a "good piece" to walk. And in a faint voice she begged her good Frau Hernicke not to leave her for to-night, for she saw such horrible figures in all the corners, and she could not imagine what she should do if Hilda had really done something dreadful, and would not come back to her.

The good-natured Frau Hernicke actually went upstairs to her neighbor's apartment, and the two worthy dames made up a fire in the stove and made some coffee, and Frau Hernicke related to the shuddering Frau Berger the most incredible tales of the

wickedness of the world at the present day and the folly of young people in a great city. In the meantime she got together some warm clothing for tomorrow's journey, and Aunt Polly cried and bewailed her hard fate, and her tears fell into the great coffee-cup, which she kept putting to her lips, though her trouble was so great she could hardly swallow.

At seven o'clock in the morning they both went to the station. The poor little aunt had her eyes all red with crying, and her nose was red with the cold, and she looked older and more worn than ever ; and as she travelled on in the cold Christmas morning, she folded her hands inside her muff and prayed that God would not punish her violence and impatience too severely. Ah, in her anger last night she did not remember that it was a day when love and mildness ought to rule. God had given salvation to His sinful children, and she herself—such a sinful mortal as she was—had wished to judge and to punish, and perhaps had even thrust a human soul that had been intrusted to her care, into lifelong misery !

But who could suppose any one would think she meant to shut her out in earnest ?

At length Aunt Polly found herself on the small platform of the little station, and asked the station-master where Sibyllenburg was situated.

“Up there on the hill, madame, where you see the tower peeping through the trees. Just go straight up, and when you get to the top of the hill you must ask somebody, for I can't describe it to you from here.”

“Could you tell me who owns Sibyllenburg ?” she inquired again.

"Well, you see, madame, it has changed hands pretty often in the last few years ; it seems sort of unlucky. I am curious to know how long the man who has got it now will keep it, if he goes on as he is doing now."

"Who is it ?" inquired Aunt Polly.

"Jussnitz is his name ; he's a painter."

The old woman began to feel her head whirling round. And Hildegarde was there !

She murmured a few words of thanks and went on her way. All the stories of elopements that she had ever read, and those which Frau Hernicke had related to her the night before, seemed to be going over and over in her head. Ah, Aunt Polly felt as if she should jump into the water herself, for she would be held responsible for this result. She had always said that that Zweidorf girl had passionate blood in her, and—ah, good Heavens, how true it was ! If Berger had lived to see this ! No one could be trusted. How proudly the girl had defended herself from suspicion ; and *he*—God forgive him for betraying that poor, inexperienced child !

She was quite out of breath when she reached the wrought-iron gate ; she had been hurrying as if it were a matter of life and death. And there stood the castle behind the bare branches of the linden-trees, looking so stately and so home-like. Lace curtains gleamed out behind the bright panes, and in one of the upper windows a mass of hyacinths and lilies-of-the-valley was in bloom, making a little spring in itself. But Aunt Polly did not see the woman's fair head against which a child's sunny curls were nestling.

"What did you wish?" asked a stately servant in blue velvet small-clothes and a leather-colored coat, who opened the door.

"Is there a young lady here by the name of Zweidorf?"

"Yes."

"I am her aunt, and I would like to see her."

"Very well; will you come in?"

Aunt Polly went into the house; Antje saw her go in from her window upstairs. The young wife had come back from church, had taken refuge in her little room, and had sat down by the window with her little Mousie, her heart full of care and anxiety, but also full again of courage and determination.

"That must be her aunt, Mousie," she said.

Some time passed, and then the servant came to Antje and reported that Fräulein von Zweidorf refused to see her aunt, and the old lady was crying bitterly and begging him to take her to the young lady, but she had locked herself into her room.

Antje gave orders to bring the lady to her. She set the child down on the carpet and went to meet Aunt Polly, who appeared on the threshold with wondering, tear-stained eyes.

"I have the pleasure of speaking to Frau Berger?" inquired Antje.

"Yes, ma'am," stammered the little woman, quite upset.

"And I am Frau Jussnitz," continued Antje, kindly. "Will you not sit down and throw off your cloak? You have come for your niece, I suppose, and Fräulein Hilda is offended and will not see

you—isn't that the case? But you ought not to have been so severe last night when my husband and I brought her home; it is not every one who could put up with that."

Antje smiled as she spoke and untied the old woman's bonnet-strings. Aunt Polly submitted passively; she could not have managed it herself in her agitation.

"Fräulein Hildegard went to a little party under my protection," continued Antje. "She represented a *tableau vivant* in her Spanish costume to please my husband, who is painting her, as you know. She ought to have told you of it, of course, but it was a sudden thought; and I hope you are no longer angry with the poor child, and you will allow her to stay with us a few weeks, will you not?"

Aunt Polly sat speechless on the sofa; she had not a word to say. She could not yet grasp the fact that she was sitting here with the wife of the man who, she had firmly believed, loved Hilda and was loved by her in return. The affair had taken on a new aspect, and a better one, thank God! But the child, the poor child!

"We had no idea," she stammered out in her confusion, "that Herr Jussnitz was married—I beg your pardon, but I thought, I believed——"

Antje turned pale. Her grieved, wondering look pierced the old lady's heart, and gave her a glimmering of the truth.

"I mean—we never thought about it," she went on, awkwardly. "What business was it of ours? Hilda had nothing to do with Herr Jussnitz except to stand still while he painted her, and I always

went with her. And then you know, gracious lady, we did not talk very much, for Herr Jussnitz always is so occupied with his painting, and we were always in a hurry to get home. Besides, we live so quietly, and the people *we* know do not know Herr Jussnitz, and that is how it happened that we never knew that Herr Jussnitz was married. If Hilda had known it she would have come out here to call and pay her respects to you, madame, because Herr Jussnitz knows her family, and——”

She stopped, quite out of breath and in great confusion.

“My husband is so wrapped up in his art that when he is painting he forgets everything else,” said Antje, smiling with pale lips. “You must not be offended at that, my dear Frau Berger; he did not mean the least rudeness to Fräulein Hildegarde, though he did not mention me or ask her to come and see me. He was simply entirely taken up with his work. For the artist who is creating a picture, the outer world does not exist.”

Then she got up and brought her child.

“Come, give your hand to the lady. Don’t you think he is very like my husband, Frau Berger?”

“Yes, yes,” said Aunt Polly, with her eyes full of tears as she stroked the child’s head. “But excuse me, Frau Jussnitz. I would like to try again to see Hildegarde. I am not angry with her. I am only sorry for her, and I think it will be better for her to go with me. I want to urge her to it if I may.”

“I will willingly take you to her room, and try to persuade Fräulein Hilda to see you,” replied Antje.

When the young wife presented herself at the

young girl's door, it was opened, and Frau Polly slipped in.

It was a very pleasant room which had been assigned to Hildegarde. Hung entirely with gay cretonne, it formed a sort of tent; the bed, sofa, and chairs were covered with a similar stuff. A soft, flowery carpet covered the floor, and a rocking-chair was still in motion in front of the tall mirror which reached to the floor. In the elegant fireplace a bright fire was burning.

"Is it really you?" escaped Aunt Polly's lips, when she had closed the door behind her; and she looked in amazement at the slender, beautiful girl, who, in a loose, pale pink morning-dress belonging to Antje—the same which the young wife had once ordered to surprise her husband on their wedding-day, and which she had never worn—looked so wonderfully handsome, and as if the tasteful gown had been made expressly for her.

Hildegarde stood there with an inscrutable face, her lips pressed tightly together. But Aunt Polly had long since forgotten that she had ever been angry. She only remembered that the child's beautiful future had suddenly come to naught.

"You poor thing," she said, compassionately, while the tears streamed from her eyes, "if I had only known before what I know now, you would not have heard a single cross word from me. Forget it all, my Hilda, and come home with me; you cannot stay here!"

But Hilda was not one of those persons who easily forget an insult, nor did she find it any easier to bear commiseration.

"I shall stay here, aunt," she said, coldly, "and when my portrait is finished, I shall probably go——"

She stopped, and twisted the pink ribbons of her dress about her finger in some confusion.

"Hilda, what will you do here? Let the picture go, let him finish it as best he may. Why should you make such trouble for yourself? It cuts me to the heart when I look at you; it is such a horrible shame that he should not have told you that he was married. Come, Hilda, this is no place for you."

"I don't know what you mean, aunt!" replied her youthful niece, very slowly. Her pale lips scarcely moved. "I——"

"Hilda, suppose it were your father urging you! You could not refuse him? Be frank with me—you love this man; can you deny it? Good Heavens, child, don't shake your head; every feature of your face, every step you took, has betrayed it all this time! I beg of you, child, come home with me; you ought not to stay here."

"I have never thought of him," said Hilda, in the same slow manner, and she turned away and walked to the window.

"Hilda, that is not true!" said Frau Berger, firmly, and her face wore an air of solemnity; "it is not true! You love him, and he loves you! I am an old woman, and I know how things go in this world. But you will be committing a frightful sin if you stay here, a sin against yourself, against him, and against his wife and her child. Only consider, for Heaven's sake, what will come of it!"

"I forbid you to say such things to me!" cried

Hilda, crimson with anger, and stamping her foot on the carpet. "Must you needs drag everything down into the mire? Can there be no relations in the world between two persons that are left unstained by vile thoughts? It is quite true that I am fond of my teacher, and as certain that he thinks a good deal of me; but is that wicked? I forbid you to put a vile construction upon it!"

The poor little aunt looked quite paralyzed with fright. Could it be possible, then, that she had been so mistaken? But no, it was only pride, that old Zweidorf pride, which constrained the girl to deny her love and her bitter disappointment; which constrained her to stay here so that he might come to believe in her indifference to him, and that it did not make her at all unhappy to see him beside his wife. The poor, foolish child had no idea of the abyss on the brink of which she was standing, and it made Aunt Polly's heart bleed to see the traces of unspeakable anguish in her face, the great, dark semi-circles under her eyes, and the quivering lips.

"Hilda," she began again, "I am willing to believe that you do not particularly care for him; but if I were in your place I would not stay here, for you must have seen that he likes you. You do not know the world. You do not mean any harm, but you have no idea how easy it is to come between husband and wife when one is a third person in the house. It is a very delicate situation, Hilda—often it is only some trifling thing on which the happiness or misery of a whole family depends. Hilda, you must remember how he used to look at you. Do

not stay here, come with me ; I have never meant anything but good by you, even though I may sometimes have been cross. I have always done my duty as well as I could. If you will only trust to me a little this time ! ”

“ You are conjuring up spectres, aunt,” declared Hilda, inexorably. “ I should be silly and ungrateful if I did not stay here.”

Aunt Polly was silent for a while, and followed her niece with her eyes as she walked slowly up and down.

“ Her young wife looked so pale, Hilda, and as if she had been crying,” she said at length.

“ Good Heavens ! is that my fault ? ” cried the girl, stopping in her walk and clasping her hands.

“ Perhaps ; one can never be sure, Hilda.”

“ But she asked me to stay herself, so the picture might be finished.”

“ Ah, child, people sometimes ask things with their lips, and their hearts cry out against it all the time.”

Hilda covered her ears angrily. “ I know what I am about, aunt, and I shall send off a letter to papa which will explain yours. Papa knows me better than you do.”

“ Why, Hilda, what do you think of me ? I did not write, and I am not going to. I only said so last night because I was angry. Come, child, come with me ! ”

“ I shall stay here ! ” cried the young girl, angrily. “ If I were to go with you I should be as good as confessing that I——”

“ That you love him and are going away because

he has deceived you, and because you are far too proud and too good to——”

“He has not deceived me, and I—I do *not* love him !” interrupted Hilda, violently.

“Can a man become indifferent to you in a minute, Hilda ? Is that possible ? Are you not deceiving yourself ?”

“There, that is enough, aunt. I shall stay here, and that is all there is about it. Be so kind as to pack up my few things and send them to me here.”

“You will get fearfully spoiled here,” said Aunt Polly, nodding gravely. “When a girl has once worn a thing like that”—pointing to the gown Hilda had on—“she doesn’t find her own shabby clothes comfortable any more. Well, good-by, then, Hilda. I shall write to your father now and tell him——”

“That you are to blame for my coming here ; only tell him that !” cried the girl, with angry tears.

“Yes, but all the rest of it, too, and that you would not take the hand that was stretched out to save you, and that you shut your ears to my words of warning. Good-by, Hilda, and look at his young wife’s eyes carefully, and see that they do not shed tears on your account.”

And Aunt Polly hid her sobbing face in her handkerchief and went toward the door. But there her anger and anxiety got the upper hand again, and she turned back.

“Do what you like, then, in Heaven’s name ! You wouldn’t listen to me !”

The door banged to behind her, and red with anger and grief, she descended the stairs and left the house without taking leave of its mistress.

Antje saw her go as she had seen her come, and a sigh escaped her. The round little body trotted away so hurriedly, as if she and her niece had parted in anger. Hilda would not be reconciled to her, then ; she was going to stay !





CHAPTER XII.

YES, she was going to stay ! But for the present nothing was seen of her. She excused herself on the plea of fatigue when she was asked to come to the table, and when Antje reluctantly went to see her in her room, she found the young girl lying on the lounge looking up at the ceiling. Her inquiries for her health were received with curt thanks. Antje sat beside her in silence for some time, or occasionally addressed a civil question to her—whether she liked her room, or if she had all she wanted—only to receive a short, “Thanks, yes,” and then she left her, thankful when she was back in her own lonely room.

The young girl’s belongings were sent to her by Aunt Polly, and when Antje went to pay her duty visit to Hilda on the day after Christmas, the room had taken on a quite different aspect. The young girl had spread out all her modest decorations and had given her new home an artistic air. Her water-colors peeped out of the folds of the wall-draperies ; masses of scarlet poppies, which she knew how to make in wonderful imitation of nature, hung over the picture-frames and filled the vases on the mantel-piece. The easel had found a place by the window, and she herself was standing before the mirror in her black cashmere dress, fastening a broad, gayly-striped Roman apron around her waist

so that the long ends of the ribbons tied at the back set off the simple frock admirably.

"How nice you have made it look!" said Antje, but she got no other answer than a drawling "Oh!" that was intended to sound modest, but which really was only rude.

"Will you come to supper with us this evening?" inquired Antje, with unaltered friendliness.

"If you will allow me, yes."

"And this afternoon? Would you like to go to walk?"

"I have some letters to write."

"Then we shall see you at eight o'clock. The gentlemen, who are invited out to dinner, expect to be back between six and seven. Till eight, then."

Antje also sat down to write a letter. She wished to finish one to her mother which she had begun some time before. But she was interrupted by the entrance of the servant.

"Gracious lady, there is some one here who is very anxious to speak to Herr Jussnitz. He insists upon waiting for him."

"Who is it?"

"He says his name is Grabe. He asked if he could see the gracious lady."

Antje assented.

A few minutes after a meagre, rather well-dressed man appeared, who introduced himself as the head of a Dresden antiquarian shop, and thereupon began to excuse himself for being obliged to intrude on such a day. But he thought that in this way, after several vain attempts to find Herr Juss-

nitz, he might meet him, and he hoped the gracious lady would excuse him for—it was only urgent necessity—the firm was rather embarrassed just now——

“Pray speak plainly,” said Antje; “what is it you want?”

“If it were possible, the payment of our bill, gracious lady.”

“Has not my husband paid yet for fitting up his studio in Dresden?”

“We have not had the honor of fitting up a studio for Herr Jussnitz in Dresden. It is only—it is for the furniture here, gracious lady.”

“What!” cried Antje, drawing her handkerchief across her forehead, which flushed suddenly.

“Yes, madame. Herr Jussnitz bought some rare pieces for his studio here two years ago, and, as I have already said, we are not able to wait any longer for our pay.”

“I will speak to my husband about it,” said Antje. “Give me the bill—how high is it? I do not really know when my husband will be at home.”

The man civilly handed her an open bill.

“Herr Jussnitz promised faithfully to pay by the first of October. Unfortunately, he did not keep his promise, and——”

Antje uttered a horrified exclamation, “But, my dear sir!”—which checked his flow of words. She had glanced at the bill, and now looked, with pale lips, at the man standing before her.

“Eight thousand marks?”

“Eight thousand marks, madame.”

She turned away and laid the bill on the table.

"Yes, it is all right ; I remember now," she said with difficulty. "My husband will settle it before the New Year—I—he—" She moved several books from one place to another. "Then Herr Jussnitz will—I thank you, sir."

The stranger had expected to get his money at once.

"Madame—perhaps a little on account," he began, "so we could at least——"

"Sir, in this matter I can do nothing without my husband," she said, curtly and decidedly. "I will give him the bill this evening, and that is all I can promise for the present."

"Very well, madame."

Antje sat still for a long time after the man had left the room. At length she stretched out her hand for the bill.

"One fan, Watteau, formerly belonging to Marie Antoinette—three thousand marks——"

That must be that fragile thing that lay half open on the carved table in her rococo boudoir, carelessly flung down as if it had been forgotten—three thousand marks !

"One Gobelin tapestry, real Flanders, fifteenth century—'Marie of Burgundy riding to the Chase.'"

Antje recalled the faded greenish-gray hanging that hung between the pictures in the studio, on which one could vaguely see a noble lady on horseback with a falcon on her wrist. This was marked two thousand marks !

And then followed some weapons and a rococo clock. This, too, was in Antje's boudoir. It bore as decoration a rose-wreathed shepherdess, with her

crook and a lamb, and behind a rose-bush crouched a little Cupid. Fifteen hundred marks !

The young wife sat still, with her hands clasped. She thought of her old father—of how he had toiled, and how modest he had been in his wants ; with what difficulty he had once made up his mind to buy a somewhat more elegant carriage with his hard-earned money, because it was only a luxury and because they had had such happy drives together in the shabby old coach. Ah, it is so horrible to love a man and to be forced to make comparisons so unfavorable to him ! All the feeling of the solid old burgher family was awakened within her ; it seemed to her as if people must be pointing at her with their fingers wherever she went. Oh, God ! But what were all these cares to the pain she had felt yesterday !

Antje went down into the dining-room, and as usual her eyes glanced over the table, but it all seemed quite strange to her. At length she heard the carriage roll into the court-yard and the eager voice of her husband inquiring : “ Where are the ladies ? ”

He came in immediately after, still in his fur coat, with a package under his arm and looking as men are wont to look after a good dinner—gay and comfortable.

“ Good evening,” he said. “ Is Fräulein von Zweidorf not coming to supper ? ”

“ Yes, she is coming.”

“ What have you been doing to-day ? ” he asked, with a good-natured air.

“ I have been writing to my mother.”

“And Hilda?”

“Fräulein von Zweidorf? I don’t know. She said she was going to write letters too.”

“I thought you would have made friends when you were alone together,” he said as he gave his coat and hat to the servant, smoothed his hair before the glass, and twisted his mustache. “That fellow Maiberg must have taken offence somehow,” he added. “He says he is going away, and wouldn’t speak a word to me the whole way. Well, he can do as he likes!”

He stopped speaking as Maiberg made his appearance, holding open the door for Hilda.

“Ah, Fräulein von Zweidorf,” cried Leo as she came in, “how do you do? You see, the air of your room does not agree with you. You have grown quite pale in these last two days. Now give me your attention, for I have had such a stroke of luck! Some people are absolute barbarians; they possess the greatest treasures without having an idea of it.”

As he spoke he went up to the table on which he had put down his package, and began to open the latter carefully.

“Only fancy, Colonel Berndorf had a piece of most precious old Meissen porcelain, and he declared he was going to give the ugly thing to his quartermaster for a wedding-present, as he couldn’t bear to see the distorted figures and wouldn’t put anything into the vase because the three women would spoil his appetite. Just look at them, the three Graces! And a quartermaster was to have one of the most celebrated pieces in the whole factory for a wedding-present!”

I raised a howl, and he wanted to give me the thing, but I bought it of him, for, of course, I couldn't be under obligations to him. Between ourselves, the piece is worth a thousand marks, but we agreed on three hundred. Well, what do you say? Isn't it a beauty?"

Hildegarde stood beside him with a pale face and with eyes that had worn a deeply melancholy look since Christmas. Leo held up the vase and they both looked at it. Antje looked up at them for a moment from her tea-urn, but she did not speak. No one had asked her opinion.

"Yes, it is very beautiful," replied Hilda.

"It will go well in my wife's boudoir," continued Leo. "Look at it, Antje."

"Thank you, you would better put it in your own studio; it is much too expensive for me," she replied, and was startled herself at the harshness with which she had spoken.

"Do you mean by that that the vase does not meet with your approbation and that you think it a foolish expenditure? Well, you can set your mind at rest, for the money did not come out of your highness's purse."

A sad smile flitted across her flushed face. Jussnitz saw it, and it irritated him so that he forgot the presence of Hildegarde and Maiberg and exclaimed, scornfully:

"I bought this vase with money which I earned myself—if you must know, I have sold a picture in Berlin. And now you can write to your mother that I wasted the first money I have earned since our marriage in buying rubbish, as she in her ignorance

is pleased to call it, instead of giving it to you to pay the butcher and baker. She will be sure to sympathize with you."

Antje, who was just pouring out the tea, shivered slightly, but made no reply. Maiberg rustled his newspaper as if he were not listening, and Hilda had withdrawn into one of the deep embrasures of the window. There was a peculiar smile on her lips, as if she were glad he should suffer from the narrowness of the "nonentity" whom he had chosen.

They sat down silently at the table ; no one felt in the mood to open the conversation. The dishes were passed round, and no sound was heard but the clattering of plates and forks. It was hot and close in the room. Suddenly there sounded a welcome voice from outside, and the gay, infectious laugh of the Baroness, and a moment later she came in, accompanied by the two Fräulein von Benken, Colonel von Barrenberg, and the inevitable Lieutenant von Osten.

"We should not venture to intrude upon our good friends and neighbors like this if it were not a very special occasion," cried Irene von Erlach. "My dear Herr Jussnitz, do you notice anything unusual about us? Guess what has happened—and you, too, Maiberg. Fräulein von Zweidorf, how do I look to you?"

When the Baroness appeared in any company she had the effect of champagne, or a Strauss waltz. And to-day more than ever!

"I have done a horribly silly thing," she continued, "and I warn you all against following my example. If I had not got tired of the everlasting teas-

ing, then—well, to cut it short, here stands ”—and she stretched up her hand to the smiling Barrenberg and caught him by his unusually well-waxed mustache—“ here stands my future husband ! ”

She clapped her hands as if amazed at herself, and laughed so heartily that they all joined in, and Leo the loudest of all. “ Bravo ! An engagement ! We must celebrate it ! ” he cried. “ Antje, order in some champagne.”

Antje obediently gave the order, and when the champagne came she clinked her glass with the betrothed pair, gravely but pleasantly.

“ I wish you great happiness, all happiness ! ” she said with moistened eyes.

“ And why shouldn’t we be happy ? ” laughed the bride. “ We do not take life so tragically, do we, Wilhelm ? We will try how it goes together—and——”

“ Well—and ? ” said Maiberg, playfully.

“ And if it doesn’t go——”

“ I say, Irene, that sounds promising,” interrupted her betrothed.

“ Well, if it doesn’t go, we will get a divorce,” she finished, putting her little hand against his lips, and he kissed it with an embarrassed smile.

Antje went quietly back to her place.

“ Bravo, Barrenberg ! ” said Leo. “ You will never be bored.”

“ Bored ? ” cried Frau von Erlach. “ Boredom is the mother of all vices. In my opinion, a wife cannot do anything more foolish than allow her husband to feel bored.”

“ Very comforting for me,” said the happy lover.

"There are a great many ways of banishing *ennui*," remarked Maiberg, carelessly, "but it is a question whether the opposite of *ennui* always means happiness."

"A hundred thousand ways," chimed in Irene, ignoring the last remark. "only amiability is not one of them, as is so often erroneously taken for granted. No man can put up with that for long. Instead, a little—but I will not betray the secrets of the prison-house, for Fräulein von Zweidorf is looking frightfully inquisitive already."

Antje turned like the rest to look at Hilda. The girl's eyes flashed for a moment, then she turned crimson.

Jussnitz looked at her admiringly. "Look like that to-morrow when I paint you," he cried. But Hilda did not appear to have heard him.

"She has a talent for what I mean," remarked Irene to Jussnitz. He smiled and nodded. Antje kept silence.

"Too silly!" whispered Melly and Nelly to each other.

After this they had a noisy game of cards, followed by a game of forfeits. The Baroness was gayer even than usual.

Antje seated herself in one of the deep window embrasures. She had a bad headache. Maiberg went up to her and begged her to go away. But she smiled and shook her head. Leo would not like it, she said. In truth, she did not wish it herself; she kept her eyes fixed on her husband, who was continually appearing at Hildegarde's side, although the girl scarcely deigned to speak to him,

and turned to Barrenberg or Maiberg in all the little turnings of the game. Antje bit her lips as she saw the Baroness smile at this, and she clenched her hands. Why had God suffered it that Leo should have married *her*, who never was suited to him? And why had He put this unspeakable love and devotion into a woman's heart so that it must break with the grief that had come to it? And she looked up at Maiberg, and could not keep the two heavy drops from trembling on her eyelashes.

"Dear Dr. Maiberg," she said, "now I know that Leo has sold a picture in Berlin."

"Frau Jussnitz," he began, sitting down on a little footstool so that he had to look up to her.

"Don't speak of it; please don't speak of it!" she cried, forcing back her tears. But she had to turn her eyes away from his true, anxious face.

"What must the person do to whom this pledge belongs?" asked Melly Benken at this moment.

"Kiss Fräulein von Zweidorf," cried Nelly, with the most innocent air in the world, nudging her sister secretly, for she knew that the latter had the host's seal-ring shut in her hand.

"Herr Jussnitz!" laughed Melly, holding up the ring.

Antje saw the young girl's beautiful face turn pale, and her eyes look at Leo Jussnitz with an icy expression as the latter approached her to put her hand gallantly to his lips.

How well that chivalric air became him, how tenderly deferential his expression was! Antje flushed as she saw it. "My God, how petty I

have grown!" was the thought in her heart, and she twisted her hands in and out in torture such as she had never known before. "If I might only die!" she murmured.

"Frau Antje!" These words, spoken in a reproachful tone, caused her to look at Maiberg with a sudden start.

Had she been thinking aloud? She shuddered all over.

"What do you think, doctor," she said, after a while, slowly and rather thickly; "would it not be better if I were to take the baby and go to my mother for a while, on account of her cough?"

"Frau Jussnitz, do not go," he said, earnestly. "Pardon me, but it would be cowardly."

She looked at him with her lovely eyes swimming in tears. "No, I will not go," she said, "I will not go!"

"Perhaps you will have the goodness to pay a little more attention to your guests in general," said Leo, who suddenly stood beside her. "No doubt it is very pleasant to sulk here in the corner, but—I must insist, for various reasons, on your cutting short these tearful confidences."

Maiberg got up.

"Frau Jussnitz, I am forced to leave your hospitable house to-morrow. I shall have to set off early, and therefore I will retire in good season. Good-by, and receive my thanks for all your kindness and goodness."

He held the slender, trembling hand for a moment in his own, but he did not see the young wife's face, which was as sad as death.

"Good-by, Leo," he said shortly, turning to his friend.

"I don't like such jokes," said the latter, quickly and angrily.

"I was never more in earnest than I am now, I assure you! Good-by! I shall take French leave. If you have anything you wish to say to me to-night, you will find me still up, for I have to pack up my things."

He looked back once more. Antje was standing beside Barrenberg, who was telling her some story. Her race was raised to his, but Maiberg knew that she did not hear a word he was saying.





CHAPTER XIII.

SEVERAL weeks had passed. The March sun was shining on the walls of the Sibyllenburg manor-house, the broad grass-plats in the garden had taken on a deeper green, the reddish-brown buds were swelling on the twigs and branches of the shrubs and trees, and the beets were thrusting their little green points out of the carefully prepared ground, peeping timidly out at the light. The crocuses and hyacinths seemed to be asking if they dared venture too, and the old gardener shook his head and carefully laid evergreen boughs over the saucy little things, to protect them from frost and ice, for it could only be a treacherous gleam of spring, and the clouds over there still held an ample store of snow.

Antje, with her little daughter beside her, was standing thoughtfully before the old man, watching him at his work.

"With us up in the mountains," she said at length, "these things do not come out before April ; this is a sunny corner of the world."

"Yes, it is a handsome place," nodded the old man, looking about him. "It would be a pity, Frau Jussnitz, if what the people say is true, that the master is thinking of selling this place."

"Do people say that?"

"They all say so. I should like to contradict it, gracious lady."

She made no reply. She had turned toward the house and was looking at it. The sun was reflected in all the windows, of which each one was in itself a dazzling little sun. Antje looked at it so long that it brought the water to her eyes. Then she walked on with the little girl; the old man shook his head as he looked after her.

At the end of the park she looked over the low wall out into the fields. She lifted the child up on the wall and let it also look out into the world.

"Papa!" cried the child, and the little hand in its white mitten pointed to a gentleman who was walking along the road at a little distance beside a woman's figure.

"Hush!" said the young wife, as she gazed after the pair till they disappeared behind the first houses of the village. "Come, Mousie!"

The child trotted along beside her mother toward the house.

"Mouse not want to go in," she cried as Antje opened the door.

"Oh, yes, Mouse; we will go into papa's pretty room. Come."

And when they had taken off their cloaks and hats upstairs, Antje went with the child into the studio. She sat down in the first chair she came to and gazed straight before her. The child in the mean time played about on the carpet.

"Here, mamma!" it said at length, putting a

little bow of red ribbon which it had picked up into its mother's hand.

Antje flung the dainty ribbon from her as if some noxious insect had crawled over her hand, and her eyes glanced at the picture on the easel. The beautiful figure of the Spanish dancer was now enclosed in a handsome gold frame, but the picture was not yet finished according to Leo's ideas. The sunbeams gradually stole nearer and nearer, and everything was as still as death around the woman thus lost in meditation ; the child had laid its head on a soft foot-cushion and gone to sleep. There was no sound throughout the whole house except the deliberate ticking of the richly gilded clock on the mantel-piece, and a mysterious rustling and crackling as if ghosts were going about.

They were not comfortable ghosts ; they whispered evil thoughts to the pale woman sitting there ; they told of broken faith, of a love that was dead, and of an unhappy, lonely future. Antje had not been cowardly ; she had calmed her rebellious heart on that evening by saying to herself that he had not yet done anything to make him unworthy of her love ; it was all to be accounted for by his artistic nature, by his love of beauty, of the magnificent relics of bygone days—even his desire to paint this beautiful girl and the need of paying her homage. Ah, yes, and it was that that had been his attraction for her, that he was so different from all the rest. She had not been able to bring herself to tell him about the antiquarian's bill. She had secretly raised the money to satisfy the man. Nothing would induce her to squabble with Leo about money. She

would not dampen his creative ardor with these petty cares ; that was her duty as his wife. No one but Antje herself and her assistant knew that she had drawn out through old Classen all the savings that had been put into the bank from her childhood up, and added to these a valuable pearl necklace, the gift of her godmother, which the old woman undertook to sell, with many sighs and shakes of the head. And she could depend upon Classen ! The old woman wrung her hands, it is true, and threatened to tell her mother all about it, but she was, nevertheless, as silent as the grave as long as her young mistress insisted upon it. Only Antje had to hear her perpetual exclamations of : " Oh, what have we come to ! What shall we come to, if you never will say anything ! "

" This is not the time for talking, Classen," Antje would answer ; " it will all come out right yet, you will see."

" Goodness me : I would give him a talking to," grumbled the old woman. But Antje did not hear her.

She thought of Maiberg ; she felt that she had lost a faithful friend. Did Leo feel that, too ? Was there any hope of Maiberg's coming back ? She did not know, and she would not ask after that last scene, for it might look as if she had a deeper interest in the doctor.

Leo had no time for thinking of anything—he was painting Hildegarde von Zweidorf.

It was a strange sort of existence, for everything seemed to revolve around Hildegarde.

Antje preserved the same tone of friendliness

toward this stranger, who was as cold and hard toward her as the winter before their doors. The servants, who, scornful of the young lady's shabby dress, and also moved by Classen's dislike of the intruder, allowed themselves to be somewhat neglectful of the youthful guest, were sternly reproved therefor by their young mistress.

Hildegarde von Zweidorf found herself received with that genuine hospitality which is the stamp of a really superior establishment. That Antje grew paler and paler the longer she stayed—well, who noticed that? A kindly expression was never wanting in the countenance of the young hostess, and, in fact, Antje had no cause to show unfriendliness to the beautiful young girl.

Hilda's conduct was blameless. She was very modest, very attentive, and—very cold. She had assumed a grave, serious air, which was a wonderful contrast, indeed, to her deep, wistful eyes, but Hilda received all her host's attentions with as much reserve as was to be expected from a well-bred young girl. She would be nothing more than an ordinary acquaintance and guest.

If Antje could only have forgotten what Leo had said to the young girl on that Christmas morning; if she had not always had ringing in her ears that passionate softness of his tones; if she could banish the memory of the young girl's heavy sobs!

And Leo stayed at home so much now; he only went to Dresden occasionally—"on business." Antje knew what he meant by that—to get money from the bank. She watched him drive away with a grave face, and she received him without reproaches when

he returned, which was always in a very short time. But that might all be because he was in a hurry to get his picture finished. And if he did accompany Hildegarde, who liked to go out with her sketch-book, what could be more natural? Then they wandered far away among the wintry hills; sometimes they did not come home till dusk, and Antje could see by the eager expression in their faces that they had been discussing something which *she*, according to Leo's ideas, could not comprehend. On such days she would stand for hours at the window, looking out into the distance, where they two had disappeared, and a sigh of relief escaped her lips when the couple at length returned.

It had grown very quiet at Sibyllenburg. Irene von Erlach, after a rather hurried marriage, had left home with her husband, and they were enjoying themselves somewhere on the Nile. The young men who had always been hanging about the gay young widow had made their last appearance in the neighborhood on the wedding-day. Jussnitz had not invited them to come and see him, because he had "his work to do," and Antje preferred a quiet life. There was in the house now that quietness which the young wife had always longed for, but there was no peace in her heart. That she found only with her little daughter. When the hour came round at which the beautiful Spanish girl was accustomed to appear in the studio in her yellow, lace-trimmed silk, Antje took refuge with her child. She taught it little verses, played with its dolls, sometimes pressed the little one close to her breast, laughed at whatever the childish lips let fall, and seemed like a

careless child herself, only that the tears often streamed down her cheeks as she played.

Once she had gone into the studio, carrying the tray with the daintily ordered lunch, but only once. She had appeared with her caviare and her salmon sandwiches in the very midst of a dissertation of her husband's, to which Hilda, sitting on a low stool, slowly waving her fan, was listening intently, with drooping lashes. Leo was talking about the two Madonnas of Holbein in the Darmstadt and the Dresden galleries, with great ardor. They did not even see the young wife, whose step was noiseless on the soft carpet. She set the tray down softly on a table and went away.

At the time when she had first visited the Dresden gallery with her husband, she had said to him : "Tell me, Leo, which of the Madonnas do you consider the original?" And he had replied : "Ah, child, you do not understand enough about it now ; I should have to make a long explanation. I will tell you some time."

But this "some time" had never come. *Now* he was giving this explanation, but to another, more worthy of consideration than she !

"How long will this torture last?" she said to herself bitterly, and she knew very well that it would last a long time yet. . . .

"I must make some compensation to Fräulein von Zweidorf for sacrificing so much of her time to me," said Leo to Antje one day. "I cannot very well offer her money, although, Heaven knows, that is what she needs most. I think we shall have to keep her here for a while, and as soon as

my picture is finished I will give her some lessons, or get some one else to do so."

Antje replied that she could not judge of this matter. "I do not know how far Fräulein von Zweidorf is able to dispose of her own time," she added.

"Bah!" he replied. "They will be glad enough at home to know that she is in good hands for a time."

Antje was silent; the matter was settled.

Hilda did some painting herself now; she had declared that she must earn some money. Leo procured silk, leather, and water-color paper, and an art-dealer in Berlin undertook the sale of the trifles she made. Even Antje once bought several little note-books on which a bird or a flower was painted with wonderful truth to nature. With her earnings Hilda bought for herself a simple but very pretty costume, and gradually she ceased to look shabby. She did not wear Leo's Christmas brooch; she had returned it to him in Antje's presence with the remark that she never accepted gifts, least of all such costly ones. The pretty glittering thing was now lying in a drawer of Leo's writing-table, with the jeweller's unpaid bill beside it. Ah, how many unpaid bills were there lying in that same drawer!

"I will settle them all before April," he had said. "By that time my picture will be sold."

And so the days had slipped by. It seemed to Antje as if there were a gray veil continually before her eyes; everything was so indifferent to her, everything—except the child!

Ah, the child ! In a moment Antje was back in the present, and she ran to the spot where her darling lay on the carpet and looked down at her. How pretty Leonie was with her golden curls and her little apple-blossom face ! Would she have a happy life ? So far as Antje could make it so—she certainly would. She should learn a great deal ; and she should learn not to hide what she knew, as her poor, silly mother did, who always was afraid when an opportunity offered to join in the conversation.

How long Leo and Hilda stayed out to-day ! The great room was already getting quite dark, and they had not come yet.

Antje remembered that Hilda had spoken of a particularly picturesque point of view which she had discovered a short time before on the banks of the Elbe, and which they were going to visit to-day. True, they had gone in that direction. The young mother carried her sleeping child to its nurse ; then she perceived that she had left her key-basket in the studio, and she went hastily back to look for it. The hall and staircase were already lighted, and she saw the servant coming up with a package of newspapers and several letters.

"Something for the gracious lady," he said, and hurrying up, he gave Antje a letter.

It was a big letter, with the address in a business hand. She at once recognized the writing of Kortmer, the old foreman of the iron works, and an old friend of the family.

As he usually sent his greetings to her through her mother, Antje was surprised at getting a letter

from him. She went quickly up to the lamp, which was upheld by a colossal figure in bronze, opened the letter, read it hastily, and then let fall the hand which held it, with an expression of torturing anxiety on her face. Involuntarily, she turned her steps toward the studio again, thinking that her husband might have come in in the mean time.

"Leo!" she called, and then listened. Her eyes, blinded by the light, could distinguish nothing in the darkness.

No answer. She felt for the chair in which she had been sitting, sat down, then got up again, took a few steps to the window and gazed out into the garden. The grass-plats looked like dark shadows, and the white gravel walks shone out among them like broad, curling ribbons. A few yellow strips of sky still glimmered in the west among the dark clouds, looking solemn and mysterious, as the old painters used to represent the heavens in the pictures of the crucifixion.

Such a picture hung above her mother's bed at home; Antje could see it before her distinctly at this moment, and she saw also a feverish face resting on the white cushions, saw eyes looking inquiringly up to the Saviour as if begging for relief, and then searching about the room for the only object that bound her to this world—her daughter.

"Where can he be? Oh, my God, why does he not come?"

At ten o'clock the express train would go, and if she meant to take it, she had no time to lose.

She controlled herself and looked about for her key-basket; there it was on Leo's great writing-

table. She would go and pack up something for her journey. The nurse was a trustworthy person, and so was Classen; everything would go on just as well *without* her—ah, yes, everything!

She walked noiselessly across the carpet and then stopped suddenly. She heard a door open across the hall.

"*Auf wiedersehen*, Hildegarde," she heard in soft tones; "get well rested; your feet must ache after that long walk. *Auf wiedersehen*, at supper!"

There was no answer; Leo had shut the door. He had only said these few words as she was going to her room.

Then the door of the dark studio opened.

"Leo," said the young wife as he came in.

"Who is it? What, you *here*?" he cried. "Why have you no light? It is as dark as pitch! Where are the matches? Can't you find the bell, at least?"

"Leo, only one word," she interrupted, hastily. "I have just heard from Kortmer that my mother is very ill. Of course, I wish to go to her—now—at once. You have no objection, Leo? I am so very anxious; she must be very ill."

Leo, in the mean time, had lighted a match and lighted the candles in the great chandelier. His expression was that of a man who had had a very unpleasant surprise.

"You cannot get up and go off all in a minute like that!" he said, slowly.

"For Heaven's sake, Leo, Kortmer writes that my mother has been unconscious since the day before yesterday."

"Well, probably she is much better by this time. The news is at least two days old."

"Leo, how can you ! I am so horribly anxious—she has no one but me——"

"Old Hanna is there," he persisted, obstinately. "You cannot possibly leave the house—now ! You forget that you have a young lady visiting you, who could not possibly stay alone with me."

Antje stood and looked at him with great, astonished eyes. "And I am to leave my sick mother alone for the sake of this stranger ?" she said in a low voice.

"You do not seem to take in the situation," he replied, beginning to walk up and down the room. "If you go, Hilda will be forced to go away also this evening, and where is she to go ? Pray, calm yourself, and to-morrow I will telegraph to the doctor, and if your mother is no better, well—then there will be time enough to make some arrangement."

She turned her back upon him and walked to the door without a word.

"Wait a minute !" he cried, impetuously. "You misunderstand the matter entirely," he continued, when she had stopped. "You know that ever since that Christmas eve at Barrenberg's people have been talking about this poor girl. If you go away now, they will say, of course, that you have left me, because—oh, confound it, don't put on a face like that, you know very well what I mean," he concluded, angrily. "It is too absurd, but—in short, we are living in the world, and must govern ourselves accordingly."

Antje gave an almost imperceptible shrug of her shoulders, and left the room.

He looked gloomily after her, and sank down into a chair, the same in which Antje had just been sitting. He felt very uncomfortable at this moment, for he had never before seen his wife look so utterly miserable.

But, good Heavens, what woman is so situated that she can get up and go off when something happens in her old home? And Antje *could* not go, and *must* not go; it was impossible just now.

Leo stooped to pick up the letter she had dropped.

"I do not like to make you anxious, Frau Jussnitz," he read, "but I consider it my duty to write to you, in case anything should happen, which God forbid! Your mother has been very ill for several days. If it is possible, I hope you will come. That your mother herself fears the worst is proved by the fact that she sent for her lawyer yesterday. A few hours later she lost consciousness. Of course, that does not necessarily imply that the worst is to be feared. But it will be better for you to come, and then you will be here in any case, and I am sure it would do your mother a great deal of good——"

Leo folded up the letter and put it in his desk.

"Exaggerated, of course," he muttered, and began to open some other letters which were lying there. As he read the first he hastily took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead, and for a few moments his face looked quite haggard.

"Another false alarm! H'm! Runo and Baskert are as solid as the universe.—What could the

old lady have wanted with her lawyer, I wonder?— he thought, half aloud. “In that case, perhaps it would be as well for Antje to go, after all. Bah! people do not die so easily. But to-morrow I must go to the bank again.”

He stooped again and picked up a little red bow, the same that Antje had flung away from her. He stared at it as if lost in thought; he remembered that Hilda had worn it in her hair that morning. Then he sighed and laid it carefully down on the writing-table, but immediately took it up again and stroked it gently with his finger, as if he had the hand of a beautiful and beloved woman in his own. Another deep sigh, and then he flung the dainty bow on the table.

“It is enough to drive one mad!” he muttered, and got up and went to the window, his clenched fist resting on the sill. Suddenly it was clenched more firmly, for down below, there on the light gravel path, moved a slender dark figure—Antje.

Was she going, after all? Then—well, then, she would be responsible for whatever might happen. No, she was coming back again. She was only wandering about in her exaggerated anxiety; there was something, then, that could shake her out of that intolerable calmness!



CHAPTER XIV.

HILDA was sitting writing in her cosy room—that is, she had been writing, and now was reading her letter over. It was addressed to her eldest sister, of whom she had lately made a confidante.

The young artist was greatly changed ; her face had grown smaller, and her mouth constantly wore that half-scornful, half-condescending smile peculiar to people who feel themselves immensely superior to all the follies and pettiness of their fellow-men, and are only constrained to keep their opinions to themselves by the force of circumstances. There was an air of watching and waiting for something in her whole manner ; her movements had grown supple and cat-like ; in short, she was scarcely recognizable for the same person she had been before. If Antje was quietly patient, *she* was absolutely apathetic in her manner. If Leo asked her if she would go to walk, she replied curtly : “ Oh, certainly,” and marched off beside him. Her manner to him fell just short of rudeness. But this reserve, this coolness, suited her admirably, for a fire blazed out of her dark eyes which formed a strange contrast to her calm manner. She was perfectly well aware that this tortured Leo, and delighted and vexed him at the same time, but she wore an air of such indifference that no one would have thought

she had any idea of the storm she had raised. And she hardly confessed even to herself the delight which this occasioned her.

When Leo writhed and twisted like a worm trodden under foot, she felt that even then all his sufferings did not outweigh what she had endured on that evening when she learned that he was married. And all this time she had not the slightest thought for Antje. What was this woman to her? *She* was quite satisfied if she only had the key to the cupboards and the linen-press at her girdle, and her baby on her arm.

She caught up her letter and read it over once more :

“DEAREST TONY:

“Do not torture me with questions, for I cannot tell you when I shall come home—Jussnitz has not yet finished my picture. And you know that I am in good hands here.

“I am delighted to hear that papa has effectually stopped Aunt Polly’s slanderous tongue. Tony, you know me—as if I would remain here if only *one* atom of all she says were true ! There are some people who cannot look an inch beyond the wall which their own narrow-mindedness and commonplace natures have built up around them. I do not love Jussnitz ; I write it down once more. How should I, Hilda von Zweidorf, come to such a pass as to be interested in a married man ? Good Heavens, it is too utterly absurd !

“Perhaps I may come home some day quite unexpectedly—for a short time. I think I shall try Munich by and by. And so I may appear suddenly in your old attic room, between the clattering sewing-machine and the work-basket. Good Heavens, how can you stand that horrible monotony, children ?

“There is little enough variety here, Heaven knows, except the caprices of my host. Now he thinks he will paint ; I fling on my costume and pose myself—though, really, what remains to be done to the picture I do not know myself ; it

might have been in Berlin long ago, so far as I can see—and in a quarter of an hour he finds himself too ‘nervous,’ not in the mood for it, and he wishes to talk instead. The next minute he says he will take a walk. If that ‘everlasting night-lamp’ were not in the house with her faint but steady glimmer, which keeps the balance against all these whims, everything would be turned topsy-turvy ; but as it is—good Heavens, how *can* any one be so intolerably stupid as that woman ?

“Do you remember that poem of Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, ‘The Silly Woman’ ? I tell you, Tony, that the Hülshoff woman was a perfect model of sense and intelligence compared with Frau Antje. She had sense enough, at least, not to make her husband’s pecuniary situation more difficult. But this one ! And always with the same cool, friendly manner ! If she would only storm and scold once in a while by way of variety, as Dürer’s amiable spouse used to do—but no ; that never happens. But what nonsense I am writing ! Good-by. Love to my father and mother and my sisters.

“Your

“HILDA.”

When Hilda wrote the words : “How could I, Hilda von Zweidorf, ever come to such a pass as to become interested in a married man ?” she had only spoken the truth. The love that she had felt for him had been destroyed by the great disappointment she had endured, but in the place of that love something else had come to her, of a nature not less passionate—hatred, the longing to prove to him that she had never loved him. This longing made her blind and deaf to all other considerations, the more she became conscious that she had once betrayed to him the real nature of her feelings.

At such times she clenched her hands and tears of wrath streamed from her eyes. There were days in which her caprices were many and unaccountable,

on which she longed to have him speak to her of his love, on which she tortured him and enraptured him only in the hope that the moment would come at length when she could proudly toss back her head and say : " Sir, what do you mean ? I do not understand you."

This very day had been such an one. Tony's letter had aroused all the evil passions in her ; there had been something in it about a letter from Aunt Polly, who swore by all that was sacred that Hilda had not been indifferent to Herr Jussnitz. She had walked beside him in their excursions with fluttering breath, she had played with him as a cat plays with a mouse ; but he had not found the courage to say what Hilda would so gladly have trapped him into saying. Hilda was conscious only that he was having a struggle with himself. But some day he would speak, and she would leave the house that very hour, with the hope in her heart that he might only suffer half so much as she had done.

Where she went was a matter of indifference to her, but she would go with her pride unbent, with smiling lips, and in the consciousness that he would search for her and not find her ; that he would be sick with longing after her.

While indulging in these reflections she had addressed the letter to her sister and begun to make her toilet. She knew that he was waiting for her downstairs in the yellow drawing-room. She dressed very slowly—this " waiting " was one of her ways of tormenting him. She spent a quarter of an hour in curling the hair on her forehead and ten minutes more in fastening a bunch of snow-drops in her

dress. She could see him in imagination walking up and down, up and down, and her steps as she turned toward the door grew slower at the thought.

She found him as she had expected, only looking very pale. Was it because of the question she had put to him in the course of the day: "When will the picture be finished?"

He had not answered her. Now she was standing before him in her best dress, a simple but perfectly fitting costume of garnet cloth, a few white flowers at her breast, and with the beautiful, apathetic face, which looked beyond him with an air of such utter indifference.

"Shall we begin to read?" she said, wearily.

He assented, and they took their seats in the chairs which were drawn up so cosily opposite each other beside the open fire which cast its reflections on the carpet.

"Where did we leave off?" she inquired, suppressing a slight yawn.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know, Hilda, don't ask me. Heaven knows I do not hear what you read—I——"

"What? You do not hear what I read?"

He shook his head.

"No," he said in a low tone. "I hear nothing, I only see you. And then I ask myself how long I shall see you. And *you* ask me when the picture will be finished? Good Heavens, Hilda, do you never suspect that I cannot bear the thought that the picture must be finished some day, of some day seeing that place vacant where you have always stood?"

And he grasped her hands impulsively and pressed them to his lips and to his eyes.

Hilda started up, deeply shocked. What she had so ardently longed for now gave her a horrible feeling of shame. She could not utter a word, only a slight cry escaped her lips, and her eyes were fixed on Antje, who was standing in the middle of the room, spell-bound, with a pale, haggard face, and with her hair, damp with the night-dews, falling over her forehead. Her great eyes were fixed on Hilda for a moment with a piteous, grieved expression, and the young girl drooped her head beneath this look. She could not pass Antje, so she left the room by an opposite door which opened into the tea-room. She felt as if she had been gazing into an abyss of grief and pain.

Leo, however, went up to his wife.

"What is it, Antje?" he said, more gently than he had ever spoken to her before. "Do you wish to go? If you are so very anxious, then go, go, for Heaven's sake."

He caught at her hand, but Antje kept it hidden in the folds of her dress; she did not move, but only looked at him with the same expression with which she had gazed at Hilda.

"Antje," he said, "calm yourself; it cannot be so very bad with——"

"With what?" she gasped out with difficulty.

"With your mother. Go, child; we must get on here as best we can without you—go——"

"No," she replied; "I will not go, I see that I—can—not go—now.—God will surely have pity on me!"

She tried to say more, but her voice broke in a sob.

"Antje, for pity's sake, do not be so horribly tragic, don't fancy the worst!"

"No, no!" she murmured. "I shall get over it!"

And she put out her hand to ward him off, as if to say: "Do not speak of it again; have pity!"

She went upstairs to her room and stood before her mother's picture. "You will forgive me," she whispered, pressing her clasped hands against her lips—"you will forgive me if I do not come. I cannot suffer three people's lives to be ruined for the sake of one. You loved your husband, and your child, too, more than anything in the world; you will understand that I must stay at my post."

Then she got out her pen and paper and wrote two telegrams, one to old Kortmer and the other to Dr. Maiberg in Berlin, which latter ran thus:

"My mother very ill; cannot go to her; if you could go—
very grateful.

ANNA JUSSNITZ."





CHAPTER XV.

ANTJE did not come to tea that night, and Hilda did not appear again, but stayed in her room.

So Leo had the table to himself, but the food tasted bitter in his mouth. At length he gave up trying to eat and devoted himself to the wine. His thoughts were in a mad whirl—about his pecuniary affairs, the stock speculations in which he had risked Antje's fortune without her knowledge, the mother-in-law who was by no means fond of him and would have been glad to put him on an allowance. He had no luck! Weeks ago he had sent off a picture to the dealer, and had since sent him a water-color sketch, but neither had been sold, though never had he been in more pressing need of a few thousand marks than now. He could send Hilda's portrait, but the thought of parting with it, of giving it up to some idiot, who would adorn his room with it, and would rub his hands and chuckle at the sight of her beauty, put him into such a jealous rage as nearly robbed him of his reason; and added to this there was the agreeable prospect of his mother-in-law's dying unreconciled to him. She had already sent for her lawyer, probably to bind the hands of her "extravagant son-in-law," so he could not waste the principal.

That scene with Antje—if he had only let her go ! Now she would go about like a poor, betrayed wife, would jealously spy upon all his movements, would be cold as ice to that poor girl, and would sit opposite him at the table with that martyr-like air, and—it is enough to drive a man mad ! “ The best thing I could do would be to drive into Dresden this very night—if it were only not for that sick mother-in-law ! ”

And now Antje wouldn't go, out of sheer jealousy ! There would be a scene this evening, he knew that very well, and there should be one, too ; he would not go out of the way of it. Better end it all with a crash than have this sort of thing going on forever.

And Hilda ? She had left him without a word, looking every inch of her like an insulted queen. He gave a bitter laugh, took a cigar, and went upstairs to make a scene with his wife. He expected to find her with the air of a martyr, with tearful eyes, answering “ yes ” and “ no ” to all his questions. That would be excellent for a beginning, for then he could say : “ Listen to me, my dear. I have had about enough of this sort of thing ! If I cannot do anything to suit you, if you take offence at everything I do, we had better put an end to it. No man could stand such a life——”

At this moment he reached the door of her room and opened it. She was sitting at her desk, writing so eagerly that she did not look up. She did not see him until he came close up to her, and then taking her pen in her left hand, she put out her right.

"Excuse me for a moment, Leo ; only the signature, and then I can attend to you."

She had looked up at him. Yes ; her eyes, her unfathomable eyes were still full of tears, but there was such a grieved, questioning look in them, under their dark lashes, that he could not begin his contemplated attack. He threw himself into a chair and began to stroke his beard.

"Won't you keep on smoking, Leo ?" she inquired, turning round as she perceived that he had laid down his cigar. "You are always more comfortable when you have your cigar."

"No, thanks," he replied, shortly.

"You always—you know I like to have you smoke, Leo."

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently. He had been prepared for everything but this friendly tone, and it irritated him indescribably.

"How happens it that the child is still awake?" he inquired, pointing to the door, through which could be heard the little one's voice ; "and what is the old woman from the kitchen doing up here ?"

"The Mouse is often awake at this time, Leo," replied Antje, pressing the stamp down on her letter, and rising as she spoke. "The nurse has gone down to the village, and old Classen has come to take her place ; that is the whole mystery. Will you go in and see Mousie, Leo ?"

"So she will get wide awake and howl the whole night through ? No, thank you !" he replied.

"I thought you might like it, Leo. You have no idea what a droll little thing she is."

"Have you hunted up the old silk dresses that

belonged to your great-great-grandmother?" inquired Leo, evasively. "I asked you to do it the day before yesterday. They will have to be tried on, and perhaps they may need some alterations."

"Yes, Leo, but under the present circumstances we need not think of the costume ball?"

"Oh, one never can tell, and you can't get a costume at the last minute. I am sure your mother has only another gastric fever in consequence of her too heavy meals; she will be quite well again by the time the masked ball comes off."

"May God grant it!" said Antje, in a low tone. Her voice sounded so hopeless that he was silent.

He had not yet found an opportunity for his attack.

She took up her work and sat down on the sofa.

"Can you not keep your hands still for the few minutes that I am here, at least?"

"Why, of course I can, Leo! I had forgotten that you do not like crochet." She put her work back into the dainty basket, and then sat still with her hands folded.

"I should like to know," he began, as he walked up and down the room, "why under heavens your mother should send for a lawyer? She made her will long ago. Is she going to change it, or what is the matter? I suppose she has told you of her intentions. Probably she wishes to 'tie me up,' as they say."

"I do not know what her intentions are," replied Antje.

"Indeed? Well, I know very well what her opinion is of me—a spendthrift, an idle fellow, and

so on. Isn't it so? And that is *your* secret opinion, too, eh? You ought to have been an obedient daughter, and not have insisted on marrying me. You should have taken your good, solid cousin; it would have been better for you and for—— ”

“Leo!” He was stopped by a shriek of anguish. “Do not say it—I implore you—not *that*!”

Antje had started up with a face pale as death, and her trembling hands caught at his arm. “It would not have been better for me,” she added hastily, “for I love you; but—for *you*, Leo, I think so too, now—I have thought so for some time.”

“For some time? What do you mean?”

“Leo, do you think I cannot see how you and Hilda—— ”

“Leave Hilda out of the question, I beg of you. It is a figment of your brain.”

“No,” she said, firmly, “it is not a figment of my brain. I have seen your liking for her grow amid a thousand tortures. Do you think I am different from other women? I have always thought you would—you must put an end to it; that you must come to your senses; but you—— ”

“Then you think I am in love with Hilda?” he inquired, with pretended calmness.

“Oh, no,” she replied quickly, in a tone of honest conviction—“no, Leo. I have too high an opinion of you both to suppose you capable of an ordinary intrigue. But you love her, and I am sorry for you—I am frightfully sorry for you both, but,” and she put her hands up before her face, “we are here—the Mouse and I—and we cannot vanish off the face of the earth.”

Strong sobs shook her frame which she strove in vain to conquer, and when she at last succeeded, she went up to him. He was standing in front of her bookshelves as if he were examining the little library, though he really saw and felt nothing but the "tactless sentimentality of a jealous woman."

"Leo," she began, "please, please try and have confidence in me! I will help you to overcome it. I will be your faithful friend, I will do anything. Think of your child. It must not perceive, as its mind awakens, that you and I——"

He turned upon her in anger that would not be controlled.

"Will you make my wretched existence a perfect hell upon earth?" he cried, his face as white as chalk. "Is it not enough that you should not have the faintest sympathy or understanding for my career, for my tastes, for my whole character? Will you rob me of all that gives pleasure to my eye as an artist, to my mind as a cultivated man? Will you, with your horrible prosaic nature, drive me from the last corner in which my much-abused artistic nature has taken refuge? Merciful Heavens, what might I not become if you were not the fetter to drag me down—yes, a fetter more horrible than any criminal drags about with him!"

He stopped suddenly. Antje stood before him strangely tall and erect. She had never looked so imposing to him, and never had he seen her soft face so rigid in its icy coldness, its unapproachable pride. She seemed like another being.

"I will no longer be a fetter for you," she said, clearly and firmly. "You are free, Leo, free from

this moment. I did not dream that you had suffered so much through me. God knows that I have always had in mind the words you spoke when you begged me to be your wife: 'I think, Anna, you could reconcile me to life again.' God knows, I have wished to do so, Leo, honestly wished it. I must have blundered frightfully, I——"

She leaned suddenly against the back of a chair beside her; a deep flush had overspread her face. "I only ask—it is so fearful that it should all come at once—remember that my mother may be dying at this moment—let it be kept secret between us till she—is better, or dead. Do not let my poor old mother hear in her severe illness, perhaps in her very last hour, that I have come home so poor, so beggared in happiness."

He tried to say something about exaggeration, about words that should not be taken so literally, but instead he rushed to the bell—Antje had suddenly fallen; she lay with her head on the seat of the chair, speechless, motionless. He lifted her up and carried her to the sofa. Old Classen rushed in and thrust away his trembling hands.

"You had better go away," she said, harshly, "and send for the doctor. I have seen her like this before."

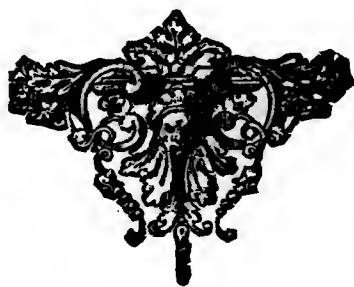
And she stroked her mistress's grief-stricken face, and smoothed out her dress.

He stood as if rooted to the floor.

"Will you be so kind as to go, Herr Jussnitz," said the old woman, reproachfully. "These fainting-fits last a long time; I know it from that time when you were brought into the house for dead. She

had one then for the first time ; and then, again, when Herr Frey wouldn't give his consent to your marrying the child. Do you see ? It all comes from trouble of some kind. Nothing comes from nothing. Sir, go, for pity's sake !" she repeated impatiently.

Then at last he left the room.





CHAPTEP XVI.

HILDA did not sleep at all that night. She did not even go to bed. When the first gray dawn came in through the curtains and struggled with the dying lamp-light, she was still sitting in the cold room in her rocking-chair, crying and shivering. The things she had taken out of the drawers and wardrobes to pack up were lying about on chairs and tables ; and there lay also a letter which she had written, addressed to Frau Jussnitz.

She had not got on very well with her preparations for departure. An intolerable heaviness seemed to weigh down her limbs, and so she had finally sunk into a chair, clasped her hands together, and had lived through again in memory each day of her sojourn here in this house.

And in this survey of the past she found no comfort in the fact that her pride said to her uneasy conscience : "They forced me to it. I only wished to show that I did not love him. I only wanted to steel myself to the consciousness that he could not be mine." Again and again came the reproachful thought : "I have thrust myself between those two. I have been the means of separating them."

And what now ?

Ah, yes, what now ? She thrust her trembling hand into her tangled hair. She felt as if she must see his wife's eyes, those eyes sad as death, as long

as she lived. They would look reproachfully at her in her last hour. She had never thought of that—that this woman possessed a heart, that she loved her husband. Love to her meant constant demonstration, caresses, worship, and clinging ; or else—caprices, tears, little quarrels and reconciliations. This woman was so quiet, so patient, so unassuming and unexact.

Hilda tried to imagine herself in Antje's position. With burning blushes she imagined the man she loved at the feet of another, of one upon whom she herself had showered kindnesses, whom she had welcomed to the house and treated like an honored guest—and her blood boiled in anger, and she clenched her hands involuntarily. Oh, she ! *She* would have sprung upon that other and would have struck her in the face. But Antje did nothing of all this. Only one look—but that was blasting. Oh, how it had scorched her ! The girl sank back and sobbed on her cushions.

"What now ? What now ?" she asked herself again and again. "Home ! I will go home at once !" she cried at last.

As if they could not see there at once that she, Hilda von Zweidorf, who had always been so severe a judge of all unworthy conduct, was herself guilty of such baseness ! And for what ? To revenge herself for a disappointed hope, such as any one else would have hidden away in her own heart. Ah, no ; that was her only excuse—she had loved him, had loved him so dearly. And what if her father should hear it ? What if the injured wife should write to him : "I cannot keep your daughter

any longer under my roof, because she has an intrigue with——”

She started up as if she had been stung. “It is not true, father,” she cried, aloud. “God knows I have not been wicked!”

Something moved in the room. Hilda’s senses were all in confusion. With a wild scream of terror she fell on her knees and stared with horrified eyes at the figure with the strangely white face which, only dimly visible in the faint gray dawn, stood at the end of the room.

“I am afraid I startled you, Fräulein von Zweidorf. I am very sorry,” said Antje’s pleasant voice. “I knocked twice, but you did not hear.”

And she bent down, took Hilda’s trembling hands in her own, and looked into the girl’s face. “Have you not been to bed at all? You will make yourself ill. Lie down now, and I will get you some tea.”

She rang the bell and tried to lead Hilda toward the bed, but the girl resisted, covering her face with her hands with a groan.

“Poor child!” thought Antje.

“For Heaven’s sake, do not be so kind to me! Scold me, strike me, trample me under your feet!” Hilda tried to say, but she produced only unintelligible sounds. Speechless and trembling, she clasped the knees of the young wife. Antje understood her.

“Do get up, Hilda,” she said, mildly. “I know best how fond of him one may get——”

But Hilda only clung the closer.

“Get up,” repeated Antje. “I want to talk to you.”

Upon this Hilda rose to her feet and remained standing with bent head before Antje, her clasped hands pressed against her lips, her beautiful face as white as death.

"I have a favor to ask of you," began Antje. "May I go on?"

Hilda nodded.

"I am obliged to go away in a few hours," continued the young wife, in hesitating tones. "I shall have to stay away some time, because—because my mother—is very ill. You cannot very well stay here *alone*—and so I wish you to go with baby and me to my own home."

Hilda made no reply. Antje had turned away as if she were looking round the room.

"No," said Hilda, at length, in a hoarse tone; "I will—I am going—if it is necessary, I can go back to Aunt Polly."

"Do not do that! You will be doing me a favor if you will come with me; more than that—a kindness. I know you will not refuse me this to-day—you cannot do it!"

"Does my presence give you any pleasure?" Hilda forced a laugh and brushed the hair back from her forehead. "It is true that *to-day* I cannot deny you anything," she continued; "but——"

"Ask no questions," entreated Antje, "but pack up your things, for we must leave at eleven, as soon as my—as soon as Leo has gone to town."

She pressed Hilda's hand and left the room. In a moment she came back again. She could not have more than reached the door. She said hastily, while a deep flush overspread her cheeks: "If

you wish to see Leo again, you will have to let him know very soon, for he is going to drive into Dresden this morning."

Hilda drew herself up proudly. "I have nothing to say to your husband," she replied.

Antje looked at her sadly. She was evidently about to say something, but she controlled herself. "*Auf wiedersehen*, then," she said, nodding.

The first sunbeam which stole through the windows of Schloss Sibyllenburg looked on a busy scene. Old Classen was standing before her mistress, holding the key-basket, Antje's inseparable companion, in her hands.

"I know, Classen, that you will be as careful about the house as if it were your own," said Antje, with a faint smile. "Make your master as comfortable as you can; the time of my return is in God's hands, dear Classen. Who knows how things may be at home?"

"You will soon know whether it is to be good or ill, gracious lady," said the old woman. "Please God, you will be back home in four weeks' time. I can't fancy the house without you, though I will do my best. It will be like a room from which the lamp has been carried out, when the carriage drives away with you and the baby. But, gracious lady, will you not go and have your breakfast with the master? He is in the dining-room now."

"I have already said good-by to him, Classen."

"Good gracious, ma'am, how pale you look! But that is all your own obstinacy—you would sleep on that miserable sofa all night."

"Classen, I cried all night, after I came to myself, till this morning; but why should I disturb

your master ? It is better to keep one's anxiety and distress to one's self."

"It certainly would be a dreadful thing if *he* should lose a night's sleep for once !" thought Frau Classen, grimly, as she looked at the narrow, uncomfortable sofa on which her young mistress had spent the night. Then she added aloud, with a deep sigh : "Oh, I will take care of him ; I know all his favorite dishes ; you can be quite easy about him, ma'am. I should like best to be going with you as nurse."

And she turned sobbing away and went downstairs into her kitchen with Antje's key-basket. There she put it in the cupboard behind the shining glass doors, and, drying her eyes with the corner of her apron, she declared that she felt just as if some great misfortune were coming to this house.

Antje, quite broken down, had locked herself into her room ; she had sent the child downstairs with its nurse to say good-by to papa. She was quite crushed and broken, and she felt a sharp physical pain in the region of the heart. The beating of the poor, tortured heart was irregular as the terrified flutterings of some imprisoned bird. She thought he must come, with the child in his arms ; he must say : "It is impossible, Antje, that you should be going away forever ; stay here with me !"

But he could not do that ! It would be hypocrisy, it would be a lie ; he did not love her. It would only have been a continuation of the same old miserable existence. No, he could not keep her, and she -- could not stay. It was all over !

Then she suddenly started up ; the child's voice

sounded in the corridor. Her head swam in her dread of seeing him again ; she shuddered at the torture of this parting, and yet—ah, it was only the nurse.

“Can you keep the baby with you for a few minutes, ma’am ?” she inquired. “I would like to pack up my things.” And she put the child down on the floor in front of its mother.

“Jump me, mamma !” said the little one.

Antje’s trembling hands caught up the light little creature. “Mouse,” she stammered out, “did papa give you a kiss ? What did papa say ?”

“Papa say nothing,” replied the child.

“The master kissed her little hand,” called back the nurse from the doorway. “I think he was in a great hurry.”

Antje fixed her burning eyes on the child and put the little hand to her lips.

“Was it so easy for him, Mousie, so very easy ?” she murmured.

Then she saw a dark spot on the pale blue bow which adorned the child’s dainty sleeve at the wrist. “Perhaps he shed a tear over you, you poor little baby. It must be a tear, he could not be so heartless. Mamma will keep the bow for you. Who knows that it may not some day be the only proof that your father ever loved you, Mousie !” And she took off the bow and hid it in her prayer-book, which lay at the top of the open trunk.

Down in the court the coupé drove up to the door. Antje heard it from the window, but she did not stir. Would he really go away without once coming to see her ?

At length she got up, took the child in her arms, and went to the window. She saw Leo standing on the steps, she saw him look up at Hilda's window, and then get into the carriage. The carriage drove away through the open gateway, and she followed it with her eyes till it disappeared round the corner of the garden-wall.

With tottering steps she carried the child back to the nursery and fled into the studio, which she locked behind her.

She was still there when the carriage drove up to take her to the station.

Old Classen knocked vigorously at the door.

"Gracious lady, it is time to go! The trunks are fastened on the carriage, and the others have got in."

The door opened, and the young mistress came out and walked past her faithful servant. "Like a ghost," said the footman, who was standing behind the old woman with her fur cloak on his arm.

She came back almost immediately with her hat and gloves on, and allowed them to put on her cloak. Then, without looking round or saying a word, she descended the stairs and got into the carriage, in which Hilda and the nurse and baby were already seated.

The housemaid looked inquiringly at the weeping Classen, when the footman shut the carriage door and swung himself up on the box. Her mistress had not even said good-by!

And the carriage drove out of the court-yard, and the wall shut out the view of the deserted house. Antje turned her head away from the

trees in the garden, whose budding branches were swaying over the wall in the spring breezes, as if they were sending their parting greetings to her and wishing her a happy return. She sat up straight in the carriage and looked out toward Dresden. The towers of the city were not visible to-day ; all were swallowed up in mist and clouds. The sun, which had shone in the morning with such a golden light, was now hidden by clouds. A few rain-drops pattered against the carriage windows, like heavy tear-drops.

Hilda crushed her handkerchief inside her muff, but not a muscle of the pale, gloomy face moved. She would so gladly have fled far away, and yet she could not, for this pale woman beside her would think she could not go far enough away, not far enough from *him*. The carriage stopped at the little station. Antje stood up to get out, but she stopped. There at the carriage door stood Leo, offering her his hand.

She stood calmly beside him, and her heart ceased its wild throbbing. It was only for appearance's sake that he bought her tickets and had her trunks weighed. He was fulfilling her last wish.

"For what place shall I take your ticket, Fräulein von Zweidorf?" he inquired of Hilda, lifting his hat.

"I am going with Frau Jussnitz," she replied.

He cast a glance of surprise at Antje. She was pulling the bows straight in the child's hat, but she felt her face flush—he had only come to see Hilda once more ! Perhaps he would think she was taking the girl with her to remove her from him !

Out of jealousy? Oh, no; he could not know so little of her as that!

They had a long time to wait, fully fifteen minutes. They found some acquaintances in the hot little waiting-room—General Rosen, with his kind-hearted wife, one of those old ladies who, on account of her kindness, had been Antje's refuge at her balls and parties. She came up to Antje with both hands extended.

"Dear Frau Jussnitz, I have just heard from your husband that you are bound on a sorrowful errand, that your mother is very ill."

Hilda, who was standing beside Antje, and made a low bow to the old lady, was entirely overlooked by her. Antje flushed. This intentional oversight—for it could be nothing else—showed her that gossip had already been busy with the young girl's name in the circle in which they moved. Therefore, after a few words of thanks, she added: "I am so fortunate, your excellency, in not having to travel alone; my young friend here is so kind as to accompany me."

Leo did not hear, he was talking with the old general; but Frau Rosen, after a moment's surprise, turned to the young girl and spoke a few friendly words.

At last the train came in. In the hurry of departure no one noticed that all farewells between them were omitted; only Antje held out the child to her father, then he put it into the carriage with her.

Hilda had got in first, and the nurse was the last. Jussnitz stood on the platform with lifted hat, and looked down the rails, which melted into one far

below by the pine-woods. When the train started, Antje felt as if she must stop it with all the strength of despair. But it kept remorselessly on its way ; the little station disappeared from sight, and she was borne away, away, perhaps—nay, probably—never to return.

From the opposite hill the summer-house at the end of the vineyard came into view ; then that too disappeared, and she saw nothing more, only monotonous pine-woods and deserted fields.





CHAPTER XVII.

THE great iron-works "Gottessegen," and the little village of Oberrode are situated in the very heart of the green beech-woods of the Harz, far away from the railroad and the populous cities. From the last station on the railroad, which stops at a celebrated watering-place in the Harz, there is a two-hours' carriage drive before the first houses of Oberrode come into view. A constantly ascending, well-kept high-road leads to this remote place, a road which the horses traverse slowly ; but in spite of this it never seems long to the tourists wending their way Brockenwards, there is such a wonderful alternation of dark forests and blue misty distances, the air is so pure and sweet, and the gay little mountain streams chatter so mysteriously far down in the ravines among the damp, luxuriant ferns.

There is something peculiar about the Harz forests. The air in them seems to be more invigorating than that of other mountainous regions. At least that is the opinion of those who were born there, and they think also that their home is more beautiful than any to be found among all the German mountains, for Goethe himself has described it and Heine has sung its praises. It would seem as if the witches and the gnomes had laid every one who

had ever trodden those green paths, under their spell.

Light was streaming out of the little heart-shaped openings in the heavy window blinds of the dwelling-house, which stood a little aside from the huge black buildings of the iron-works. Every child about the place knew those six shining hearts; their friendly light was a token of all the pleasure, gayety, and happiness that the youthful Oberrodgers had ever known; for these hearts shone out from the great sitting-room of Frau Bergrath Frey, in which every Christmas the great tree appeared in all the splendor of its lighted tapers and with the gifts for each one of them laid underneath.

Yes, the workmen's children loved the stately Frau Bergrath, who was, moreover, godmother to the greater number of them; and no village child ever ventured to boast of having received any very great favors from their Lady Bountiful, at the risk of hearing from a workman's child: "Oh, *you* needn't boast; she don't care for *you*! *We* get all the good things; she is *our* Frau Bergrath! She only gives *you* a little bit so you needn't feel left out!"

But to-day the children were huddling together in their own homes, listening to the wild storm outside and looking sadly across the broad common at the flaming hearts in the big house, and saying to their mothers: "Will she really die, our Frau Bergräthin?" The mothers wiped their eyes and nodded. "Yes; there is no hope; and what we shall do then God only knows!"

And the work-people were saying the same thing

between the blows of the heavy hammers, before the red glow of the forge fires. What would they all do if she died ?

The old superintendent, Kortmer, asked the same question, in the sick woman's sitting-room, of Dr. Maiberg, who walked incessantly up and down the dark oak floor. "Ah, if Frau Jussnitz were only here, Herr Doctor !"

"She may be here at any moment now, Herr Kortmer."

"Then her mother will get better. You can have no idea of how anxious she has been about the child ever since they brought in her future son-in-law, about five years ago. You know he met with an accident, Herr Doctor, out shooting. He was an artist and came here to paint, and took a fancy to go shooting, and thought a gun was as easy to manage as his mahlstick. Pardautz ! He did get into trouble ! Well, as I was saying, from the moment that he was brought in here, she has never had an easy moment. Love is a curious thing, and a girl's heart is past my understanding. Who would have thought that 'our Antje' would take up with a man like him ?"

"My friend, my dear Herr Kortmer, is just the sort of person to win a girl's heart."

"Your friend, Herr Doctor ? Oh, in that case—I had better have held my tongue."

"Least said, soonest mended," replied Maiberg with a smile, looking at the little old man, who was polishing his spectacles with his red silk handkerchief, and then with a swift movement put them back on his hooked nose, which, in conjunction

with two big round goggles and the shock of white hair over the forehead, lent to the face some resemblance to a parrot, though without detracting at all from its amiability.

The superintendent was a really very nice old man and an absolutely reliable official, who would have laid down his life for any of the Frey family, quite undisturbed by the fact that his wife would thereby become a widow.

"That is always best, Herr Kortmer. I have known Jussnitz a long time now, ever since I was in the first form. I have seen him play all sorts of mad pranks, but have never known him do anything that was bad. He is eccentric, he is extravagant, he is not an accountant, but he is a really good fellow, and there is only one thing that makes me anxious about him."

"You mean that his wife isn't suited to him? Nay, dear Herr Doctor, that is no news; we all know that, every child about the place knows that."

"No, Herr Kortmer, that is not what I was going to say. What I did mean was that he is *too prosperous*."

The other made no reply, for Hanna, the old housekeeper, came in just then, and reported that the patient had gone to sleep after she had taken her medicine.

"The rooms for Frau Jussnitz and the child and nurse are ready," she added, "and I only wish they had got here safely. Such an awful storm as it is! It is raining and snowing all at once, and the roads are one sheet of ice."

Maiberg stood listening at the window, which he

had opened. "The carriage is coming now," he said quietly, walking toward the door.

In the hall, which according to old custom was placed in the middle of the house with great waste of space, and which by the carved beams under the ceiling and the panelling of the walls showed that the original destiny of the house had been that of a ducal hunting-lodge, the housekeeper had thrown the door wide open, so that the wind blew the rain in in streams. The great lamp was lighted, but the wreaths which the maids had hung up in token of welcome, the old Mamselle had had taken down again.

"Good Heavens! is the poor young thing coming home for pleasure?" she had cried. "Spare your wreaths; unhappily, there may soon be another occasion for which we shall need them."

In spite of the rain she ran down the steps; her white apron streamed behind her like a white banner in the darkness, and before Maiberg and Kortmer could get there she had flung open the door of the carriage and called out: "Good-evening! Good-evening! Good Heavens, such a storm as it is, Frau Jussnitz! and with the little baby, too!"

But the person addressed did not accept the offered hand; the figure that slipped out of the carriage and stood on the wet gravel, in which the light of the hall lamp was reflected, was that of a stranger, was—could that really be Hildegarde von Zweidorf, that pale, haggard face with the sad, weary eyes? Maiberg was quite shocked as he came up.

“Fräulein von Zweidorf, is it you?” he stammered. “Is Antje—is Frau Jussnitz——”

“How is my mother?” now sounded close beside him. There stood Antje with her child on her arm.

“Herr Doctor, dear Herr Kortmer, I am not too late?”

When this question was answered in the negative, Antje tottered and nearly fell—the fearful strain was removed. Leaning on Maiberg’s arm, she crossed the threshold of her old home. With his soothing calmness he scarcely spoke of the sick woman, only saying that she was asleep, her daughter could see her later. At present she must take some food, change her clothes, and put the child to bed.

And he was obeyed. The ladies mounted the broad old staircase to the next floor. The house-keeper carried the child, who was sleeping soundly and sweetly.

“We have been expecting you ever since three o’clock this afternoon, Frau Jussnitz. Were the roads so bad that you could not get here earlier?”

“No, it was not on account of the roads, but it was the fault of my nurse that we had to take a later train,” replied Antje, in a whisper, as she passed down the broad corridor, touching caressingly the old presses as they passed. “We stopped for the night in Halle on account of the child, and this morning the old nurse suddenly declared that she would not go any further. All my persuasions were vain. Is there one of the housemaids trustworthy enough to take her place?”

She opened a door at the end of the corridor and said: "Is the little one to sleep here, Hanna? Probably I shall have very little time to attend to her now, I— In case of need we shall have to look round and see if any one is to be found at the works or in the village."

"Frau Jussnitz," replied the housekeeper, hesitatingly, "as for the maids here in the house, good Heavens, they hardly know whether they are on their head or their feet now, for the work there is to do. Just fancy, a sick person in the house, and the doctor, and now you——"

"May I—would you not trust me to look after the little one?" inquired Hildegarde, and her eyes looked up imploringly at Antje.

"You? Look after a little child?" replied the latter, smiling in spite of her sadness. "No, Fräulein Hilda, that would never do."

Then the young girl began to entreat. "*Please* let me take care of her, Frau Jussnitz. I will watch every step. I will not sleep at night. I will sit by her bed. Do not refuse me this!"

The young wife made no reply.

Hilda drew back with a deep blush, but in her eyes there was such a hurt look that Antje said quickly:

"If you will really take so much trouble! I know you will take great care of my Mousie, because she is—" She stopped. "His child," she was going to say, but the words remained unspoken.

Hilda did not understand her. She had taken off her hat and cloak, and taken the sleeping child from the old woman's arms.

"Now you can be quite easy, Frau Jussnitz, and thank you!" she said. And Antje saw the tears streaming from Hilda's eyes as she sat down on a chair near the stove and began to pull off the various wraps from the child as if she had spent her life doing nothing but wait on children.

Antje went away.

The room next her mother's had been made ready for Antje; the same in which her father had formerly slept and in which he had died. The brown folding-doors which connected the two rooms were open. Antje signed to the housekeeper to stay behind, while she glided across the carpet to this door, and there she stood and listened to the sounds that came from the great canopied bed in which her mother lay; the features of the sleeping woman were scarcely visible in the faint glimmer of the night-lamp. She was forced to put herself under strong constraint to keep from rushing up to the bed and sinking down on her knees before it and crying out: "Mother, mother, I am here! Ah, if you knew how unhappy I am, how very unhappy!"

She gave a sudden sob. This pleasant old home, the memories that crowded upon her so forcibly, the depth of her grief for all she had lost and for all she was about to lose, coming all together, quite overpowered her. A feeling of utter weakness came over her; she sank down on the floor and scarcely knew what was happening to her. Half-unconscious, she heard the beating of the storm against the blinds, the pelting of the rain as she had heard it so often as a child in her soft, warm bed, which

stood close beside her mother's ; as she had heard it in those first sleepless nights of her maiden existence, those spring nights when she thought she could never be glad again, that she could not live without that pale, sick man, who had said to her : " I believe you could reconcile me again to existence ; " in those nights when, by her father's desire, she had tried to look on her lover as lost to her forever, and then—in that blessed, sleepless night when her happiness had robbed her of slumber, the happiness of knowing that *he* was her own.

It seemed as if she were living this all over again. She heard the ticking pendulum of the tall clock ; the dull thud of the hammers mingled with her dreams. She heard her mother's heavy breathing, and held her own breath in order not to waken her. It was so sweet, so comfortable, so safe, in this lofty room.

All at once it seemed to her as if it were again the night before her wedding-day. Was not that her wedding-dress lying there ? The coals are glimmering in the fire-place—it is already cold up here in the mountains—and her mother has come softly into her room again to kiss her ; but she does not stir, she pretends to be asleep, to hide from her mother how happy she is at the thought of going away on the morrow with this strange man, far away from her home forever. And the mother weeps and prays by her bedside ; she can hear it so distinctly, but the voice is faint and mournful, like the groans from a weak chest.

" *Must* I be unhappy then, mother ? " cries Antje. And then it seems as if everything were going round

in a circle with her, as if a dazzling light were hurting her eyes. She tries to move her limbs, but they are as heavy as lead, and then she feels herself lifted by a strong arm and hears a voice saying: "Bring some wine, Hanna ; she has fainted. God grant that she may soon recover ; all may be over in half an hour ; the Frau Bergrath is dying."

This brought Antje back to consciousness at once. She stood up on her feet, and her anxious and incredulous eyes sought Dr. Maiberg's face. "Dying? My mother—now—dying now?" And with tottering steps she went into the sick-room and sank down by her mother's bed.

"Mother!" she cried, low and tenderly ; "mother, I am here—your Antje. Don't you know me?"

The hand which was already growing cold did not return her pressure, but the eyes turned slowly toward her and an almost unearthly light came into them. Antje sat down on the edge of the bed and threw her arm round the dying woman's neck ; her head bent down over the gray head ; her lips rested on the damp forehead.

"Go to sleep, dearest mother," she said, softly ; "I will stay with you."

"Antje," murmured the faint voice, "my last will, Kortmer—my will——"

"Yes, mother ; everything shall be as you wish."

"Thank you, my child. I mean it well. I would always do my best—Antje—I am tired—your father is calling me—yes—yes—I am coming. . . . Don't cry, Antje—don't break down—be strong, my good child!"

"Yes ; I will be strong," said Antje, and held

her mother in her arms till she fell asleep ; it was not long—she slept peacefully away. At length Antje laid the beloved head gently down on the pillow, and kissed the eyes that would never see again.

Her former faintness came over her again, but she struggled against it with all her might. "I will be strong !" she said again as she went into the next room. There stood old Kortmer and Maiberg, and there were the servants of the household, the men standing gravely silent, the maids crying softly. "My mother is sleeping," she said. "Go to bed, now, all of you. To-morrow morning early let some one go to the Herr Pastor. I wish to see him."

"I will watch with you by the Frau Bergrath, Frau Jussnitz," said the old housekeeper, pleadingly. But Antje shook her head.

"You will need all your strength, Hanna ; you must go to bed, too. I need no one with me to watch by my mother."

Then she went back into the chamber of death.

The storm outside had worn itself out ; all nature had grown still. Only the work in the forge went on, and the flames of the great furnaces cast their reflections on the woods and the hills and even into the room of the dead woman. Antje had thrown back the blinds. She had lighted no lamp. She felt that the glow from the great forge was the fitting death-light for her who lay there—the light that had shone over her happy, laborious life ; that had lighted up her labors of love that had brightened the path of duty in which she had always walked with rare steadfastness.

And Antje sat down by the bed and kept her quiet watch by the most faithful, unselfish heart to be found in all the world ; the heart which, when it has once ceased to beat, nothing can replace—the heart of a loving mother.





CHAPTER XVIII.

"My husband will not be able to come, dear Kortmer," said Antje to the little old gentleman, when he expressed his surprise that the carriage which he had sent to the railroad station had returned, bringing the two unmarried sisters of the late Bergrath Frey, but without the son-in-law of the dead woman.

"But my dear Frau Jussnitz, I beg your pardon," said the polite little man, "it is not a question of *being able* to come; he *must* come, for by the wish of our dear friend, the will is to be opened and read immediately after the funeral. It says expressly: 'In the presence of my daughter, Anna Jussnitz, and her husband, Leo Jussnitz, as well as of all those relatives who shall do me the honor of attending my funeral.' So——"

Antje was standing in the little private study which had been her father's. It looked out on the iron-works, and was very plainly furnished. Against the wall stood a large, much-worn leather-covered sofa, above which a hanging clock swung its pendulum; a massive writing-table of mahogany stood near the window, on which were placed books and papers, bits of ore, plans for buildings, and so forth, in perfect order.

The middle of the table was taken up by an enormous inkstand of cast-iron. Antje knew it well ; she could recall perfectly the first time her father ever used it. It represented a locomotive, the boiler of which contained the ink. The Frau Berg-rath had had it made as emblematic of her husband's business—railroad iron—and felt very proud of her invention.

Behind this extraordinary inkstand stood Herr Frey's photograph.

Antje's sad eyes wandered over these familiar objects, and her lips quivered. She recalled the day when she had crept softly into this room, had thrown her arms round her father's neck, had laid her tearful face against his cheek, and had said imploringly : " Father, father, give him to me ; do not make me so unhappy ! "

And he had replied :

" Anna, your strong wish has impaired your clear judgment. I cannot imagine *that* man your companion for life. You will be unhappy, my child."

But she had begged and prayed. When did strong passion ever listen to reason ? She was not different from other people. Does one who really loves ever see clearly ?

She had implored him again and again ; she had gone down on her knees to her devoted father, and had cried : " Say yes, father. I would a thousand times rather be unhappy with him than live without him ! "

Then he had yielded. " But do not blame me when you find yourself undeceived ; do not blame *me* ! "

And Antje had kept her word. She had never complained when she became conscious that she had deceived herself, and that he was disappointed in her.

She made up her mind to do her duty, and to force Leo by her example to do his. She would be content with the fact of living beside him, even though she was neglected, for the child's sake, in the hope that some time things would mend—and then—then he had told her that she was the chain that dragged him down, that would not let him mount to the sunny heights of art; and then all her strength, her hope, and her will had given way.

“He *must* come!” said Kortmer again. “You must send him an urgent telegram, Frau Jussnitz.”

“No,” she said, raising her head; “he *can* not come.”

“But, good Heavens, my dear, good Frau Antje, is he ill?”

“I think not.”

“Or is he so embittered against your mother that he will not even come to her funeral? Or—have you had a quarrel with him——”

The young wife started; her hands dropped helplessly by her side, and with horrified eyes she gazed into Kortmer's face. Did he suspect, did he already know this terrible thing that had happened?

He stood before her with an anxious face. “Don't be angry with me, dear Frau Antje,” he said. “It is absurd to say that, of course. But whatever it is that keeps him, it must be put aside, for he will require his presence.”

He felt so sorry for her; he knew, of course, that

all was not right between them, knew it from her mother, who had unburdened her anxious heart to him ; but the remark about the quarrel had escaped his lips involuntarily.

Now he had hurt her, though he had probably not hit very wide of the mark.

“Do *you* telegraph, dear Kortmer,” said Antje, at length.

He left the room to write out the despatch. But she sank down into the old arm-chair in front of the writing-table, and hid her face in her hands. It was so frightfully hard—how should she excuse his absence to all these people ? He must not come, he could not ! How soft and peaceful was her grief for the dead, in comparison with this grief which she was forced to hide away from the world !

A gentle knock at the door startled her—what if he had come after all ? No, it was only Hanna, the housekeeper ; she had a long paper in her hand on which minute directions for the funeral were marked down in her mother’s handwriting.

Antje now had to go from the attic to the cellar, to unlock chests and cupboards. Everything was arranged for all that would be necessary for the sad ceremony. Even the mourning aprons for the servant-maids, the crape bands which the bookkeepers were to wear on their hats, were all ready ; “for”—so said the paper—“I know how hard it is when one has these things to look after with a sad heart. I found it so when my dear husband died, and I wish to make it easier for my dear Antje.”

How touching is the care and love of a mother, extending even beyond the grave !

The young wife's breast heaved with a sob as she read these words.

"Ah, dear me, Frau Jussnitz," sighed the old housekeeper, "how shall we ever get along in this house without our Frau Bergrath? Such a woman as your mother is not to be found twice in all the world. If you were only going to stay here, Frau Jussnitz!"

Antje was *silent*; she did not even know whether she might stay here in the great, lonely house. She had no idea of what was to become of her; she was only sure of one thing, that she would be alone in the world wherever she was, she and her child.

Antje went at length into the great hall on the ground floor, in which her mother was lying in state. This room had folding-doors which opened on the garden terrace, and adjoined the so-called visitors' room, which opened into the Frau Bergrath's sitting-room, whose windows looked out on the great, smoke-blackened buildings of the iron-works, and the houses of the workmen. A row of fine old lindens stood before these windows, the embodiment of poetry in the midst of the prose of this world of labor, of iron industry.

Hanna was busy in this room, arranging masses of wreaths at the foot of the coffin. There was not a house in the whole neighborhood which had not sent at least a simple wreath of evergreen, and they still kept coming. The coffin was surrounded by the orange-trees which had been the dead woman's pride, and numberless white candles shone out of the dark green of their leaves.

Occasionally one of the workmen's wives would

come in with soft and reverent tread, leading a child with terrified eyes by the hand, to gaze once more at the dead, to sob in her handkerchief, and to press Antje's hand. She, in her dull grief, went through it all mechanically.

"Cry a little, gracious lady," said one withered old woman to her. "It will ease your heart ; a death without tears, that isn't good."

She nodded to the old woman, but she did not in the least understand what she had said to her. Then she went quickly into the visitors' room.

"What is this?" she inquired, pointing to a table covered with a black cloth, on which were an inkstand and two silver candlesticks, while a double row of chairs stood in front of it.

"The Frau Bergrath wished it to be so," replied Hanna, who had just been fastening black crape bows over the pictures of Antje's parents. "Did you not read it, Frau Jussnitz? The will is to be opened here after the funeral, and on those two front chairs you and Herr Jussnitz are to sit."

Antje turned quickly away and went back into the great hall. With clasped hands she went up to the coffin.

"Thank God," she murmured, "*you* will not see me sitting there, so alone—so utterly alone !"



CHAPTER XIX.

IN the mean time, Hilda von Zweidorf was presiding in the nursery. The child had taken a little cold on the journey, and she cried constantly and kept calling for her mother. Hilda knew that Antje had as much as she could do in making all the preparations which are necessary for such a sad ceremony as a funeral. Therefore she did her best to pacify the child, to put it to sleep, and to amuse it when awake. But in vain.

Antje had come in several times in her sombre mourning garments, with her pale, haggard face, and the child had cried aloud in terror ; it was afraid of the black dress.

At length, toward evening of the second day, Hilda, quite exhausted by her unaccustomed efforts, begged Dr. Maiberg to come and see the child.

He came into the light, comfortable, old-fashioned room. Hilda was sitting before the table, with the child on her lap, with unwearied patience building up the blocks which the perverse little creature insisted on knocking down again. "Mamma come," was its constant cry ; "but not the black mamma !"

"Probably there may be some childish disease coming on," said the doctor, laying his hand on the hot little head. "For the present there is nothing

to do but to wait patiently, Fräulein von Zweidorf. Shall I send some one to help you ? ”

“ No, thank you,” she replied, curtly.

“ You seem to be suffering yourself.”

“ Not at all. But please tell me, Herr Doctor—”

She stopped and blushed. “ Tell me,” she began again, “ why does not Herr Jussnitz come ? ”

“ I should think *you* ought to know that,” was the sharp answer. But the next moment he repented it. She looked at him so helplessly, so piteously, and her proud head drooped lower and lower ; she looked utterly crushed and broken. He suddenly felt a horrible certainty that something decisive must have occurred at Sibyllenburg. He caught at her hand and was about to speak.

“ Don’t,” she said, harshly, getting up. Taking the baby in her arms, which burst into loud crying when it saw itself deprived of its playthings, she began to walk up and down the room, quite incapable of pacifying the child, unable to choke back her own sobs.

He went up to her and relieved her of her obstreperous little burden. And she fled from the room, down the stairs, through the hall.

She did not see Antje standing there in front of the great linen-press with the housekeeper. She had but one thought—away, where she could hide her burning shame—away, never to come back, never !

The wind tore the heavy door out of her hand. She left it open and rushed down the steps, and then came to a sudden stop and caught at the iron railing in her horror and amazement, for a carriage

had just driven up, out of which sprang a tall, slender man.

She felt as if she would like the earth to swallow her up. It was Jussnitz.

She saw Antje come forward to meet him ; saw by the light of the lamp the young wife's eyes fixed reproachfully on her, as if to say : " Could you not wait a little while ? Could not even the presence of the dead under this roof restrain you from rushing out to greet him ? "

Of course she could not help thinking thus when she saw Hilda dashing down the steps to meet him in all the joy of seeing him again whom she loved !

She had on neither cloak nor hat ; she could not say : " I wanted the fresh air ; I felt as if I should choke in that room upstairs ! "

She only stood there, trembling like a guilty thing.

" Will you not come in, Hilda ? You will take cold in that sharp wind," said Antje's voice, with perfect calmness.

And she obeyed.

Jussnitz was standing in the hall with Kortner. Hilda went past him toward the staircase with her head thrown proudly back.

Leo bowed civilly and formally to the young girl, but she did not return his greeting ; she went upstairs step by step, and walked slowly along the corridor. When she reached the nursery, she said to Dr. Maiberg, whom she found sitting patiently by the baby's bed : " Go, I beg of you ; I wish to be alone."

" And what if I will not go and leave you in this excited state ? "

"You will—Jussnitz is just arrived."

He looked at her almost with compassion.

"You should not excite yourself so, Fräulein Hilda," he said, as he went gloomily out.

The door was locked behind him. Then he heard weeping, bitter weeping, which was evidently suppressed as much as possible, and yet passed all bounds. And amidst these sobs, in which the terrified child joined, came an ardent prayer from her lips: "Oh, grant that they may be reconciled in the presence of the dead! Let the print of my footsteps be washed away from the life-path of these two, I pray thee, O God! Hear my prayer, or let me die!"

Maiberg, standing outside, caught only a few words here and there. Shaking his head, he went down the stairs. He found Jussnitz alone in the sitting-room; the housekeeper, with one of the maids, was setting the table for tea in the adjoining dining-room.

"How do you do, Leo?" said Maiberg.

Jussnitz started up out of his chair; his eyes opened wide, but he could not utter a word. His friend stood before him without speaking.

"How came you here?" asked Jussnitz, hoarsely.

"By your wife's wish."

He gave a short laugh. "To be sure, I might have known that."

"Of course you might, Leo."

"Yes, to be sure; but sometimes one—does not see what is before one's very eyes," remarked Leo, with peculiar emphasis.

A fleeting smile passed over Maiberg's countenance, and his face suddenly brightened.

Then the two old ladies came in, the sisters of the Bergrath; the housekeeper followed, and invited the two gentlemen into the dining-room. Frau Jussnitz begged to be excused for not appearing at the table; she had still a great deal to do.

Her excuse was readily accepted, and only old Kortmer knew that she was sitting idle in her old, girlish room. But even the old gentleman had no idea how great her trouble was. She walked up and down incessantly, like a person who is a prey to the most utter despair.

A single light was burning in the room, just revealing the furniture, the old-fashioned hangings, and the low panelled ceiling. The airy white bed in which she had dreamed her youthful dreams rose half-ghostlike from the dusky corner.

Antje had once heard of the "second sight," and it seemed to her as if a fair head were lying on the pillow there, as if two hands were clasped in bitter grief. What have you come to, Anna Frey?

She ran to the door; she would go and get her child, the only thing she possessed in the whole wide world. How could she have allowed that other to care for it only for a minute even? But her hand dropped from the knob—she *would* not meet him there; she could not have borne the sight of those two together—by Leonie's bed.

Good God, he had only come because Hilda was here! Again she saw in spirit that light figure going down the stairs, flying through the hall—to meet him; and she forced herself to stay away from the

little one ; for the first time she went to bed without kissing her good-night ! She took refuge on the sofa and hid her head in the cushion, so she need not hear his step pass on his way to the nursery. At this moment she was only the passionately loving wife, who fears to receive the last decisive proof that her husband is lost to her.

At length she started up and listened with gasping breath and her hands on her throbbing temples. There were voices outside, Leo's and Maiberg's. Antje could hear them saying good-night. Hanna's voice, too, came to her ears :

"Herr Jussnitz," she said, "I have given you your old room, if you have no objection. The gracious Frau thought——"

She could not hear his reply ; he had walked rapidly away.

Antje drew a long breath and then burst into a flood of tears. Good Heavens, what would she have ? She had been on the point of forgetting that he had called her a drag on him, that she must give him his freedom.





CHAPTER XX.

THE funeral was over.

From the house itself, across the great square covered with black sand, bordered on one side by the houses of the work-people, on the other by the buildings of the iron-works, the path the procession had to take had been thickly strewn with white sand and evergreen boughs. This path wound along the rushing stream which usually drove the great hammers now resting in solemn stillness, down through the village to the little church-yard.

In front of the "Pine-tree Inn" in Oberrode stood a crowd of carriages; in the great inn parlor sat all the people who had come to pay their last homage to the greatly honored woman, but who were not sufficiently familiar friends to count on the hospitality of the great house to-day. There were foresters, manufacturers and mine-owners, landed proprietors and business friends. The hospitable parsonage was also thrown open to the funeral guests. Every one knew that after the funeral the will was to be read, and every one was curious to hear its contents, and who was to be the owner of this great property.

At the "Pine-tree Inn" the conversation was very animated. One man declared that "Gottessegen" would now be given over to a stock company, and

the son-in-law would probably be one of the chief stockholders.

A second declared that the Frau Bergrath had never approved of stock companies.

A third asserted most emphatically that the daughter would receive a considerable sum, and that Ferdinand Frey would have the iron-works, of course to be held in trust for the Jussnitzes.

"Who is Ferdinand Frey?"

"Why, the Frey who is in the mining office in N——. You know Frey?"

"Oh, yes; of course."

"But that would be unjust to the daughter."

"Good Heavens! she will have enough."

"Nay, nay! The Herr Son-in-law will soon have to sing small, and the old Frau Bergrath knew that very well—she could hear the grass grow. Upon my word, she was a resolute woman. Take my word for it, she has thought out something quite out of the common."

In the house of mourning there were only the few people who were to be present at the reading of the will of the "resolute woman." Through the windows of the room they could look out on a dull, rainy afternoon; there was a stupefying odor of cypress, juniper, and tuberoses. People stood about, talking in whispers,—the cousin, Ferdinand Frey, a young man with a dark, attractive face; the old sisters, who held each other's hands, anxiously waiting to hear whether their future fate was to be endurable or not; the pastor, the notary, Herr Kortmer, and --Jussnitz.

Antie had not come yet; they were all waiting

for her. At last she appeared, pale, with her hair brushed plainly back, her gloomy mourning robes, and her eyes almost extinguished in her grief.

The old lawyer went up to her and led her to her seat, into which she sank at once. With her eyes cast down, her hands folded in her lap, she sat there, with Leo beside her, and behind her chair Ferdinand Frey, whom her parents had once destined for her husband.

The old lawyer of the Frey family prefaced the reading of the will with a few agitated words, addressed chiefly to Antje. He said how sad it was for him to be obliged to fulfil so soon his hard duty, the duty of speaking to the orphan in the name of the deceased. Then he opened the important document, after he had called those present to bear witness to the fact that the legal seal was intact, and began :

“In the name of God.

“Since I have become convinced myself, and my physician has assured me, that I have not much longer to live, I have determined to draw up my last will and testament. I have settled upon my disposition of my property after grave consideration, and in full agreement with the views of my late husband, often expressed to me, as to what would be for the best good of our daughter. By the will of my dear husband I have been made his sole heir, with power from him to dispose of the entire property according to my good will and pleasure. He knew that he could trust me entirely, and this confidence has given me more happiness than all the worldly goods which he bequeathed to me.

“Therefore, I designate our only child, Anna Clara Jussnitz, born Frey, as the heiress of all our worldly goods, but especially of the iron-works ‘Gottessegen,’ established by my late father-in-law, Christopher Gottlob Frey ; with the ex-

ception of a capital of sixty thousand marks, which is to go to our nephew, Ferdinand Frey, of N——, whom we have always loved as a son.

“My daughter, Anna Clara Jussnitz, will enter upon this inheritance on the following conditions :

“(1) She will be obliged to take up her residence at the iron-works ‘Gottessegen.’

“(2) She is to undertake the conduct of the business. Without her consent and signature, no changes shall be made in the management of affairs, no important contract shall be undertaken, nor any officials be engaged or discharged. She is to be at the head of the business, as her father and I have been ; but I charge Herr Friedrich Kortmer, who has for years been the superintendent of the works, to stand at her side as counsellor and adviser.

“It may seem strange to many that I should make this disposition of my property. I have done it for two reasons—one of these is known to my daughter and to my son-in-law, and I will spare them further comments in this place. For the second reason, I would say to those who doubt a woman’s capability for conducting a business like this, that I, who am not a blindly impartial mother, am convinced that my daughter, Anna Jussnitz, possesses the qualities requisite for the head of this great establishment.

(3) My daughter, Anna Clara Jussnitz, is required to invest annually one-fourth of the income from the business in lands, woodlands, or houses, as a capital for her heirs, and also to devote annually a certain sum to the improvement and enlargement of the business so that it may never decrease or diminish. Furthermore, I enjoin upon my daughter, within the next four years, to build a hospital, to enlarge the schools, and to appoint a physician for the workmen of the iron-works. I charge her also to provide for him a suitable dwelling. Moreover, I desire that she should complete the Home for Aged Work-people, and see that it is provided with all proper sanitary arrangements. I have the fullest confidence that my daughter will carry out this, my last will, which is also that of her father, and will not be turned from her duty by any wishes to the contrary from any quarter whatever.

“(4) But in case my daughter will not or cannot comply with these conditions, in accordance with my husband's expressed wishes, I appoint in her place her daughter, Leonie Jussnitz, now aged three years; or in case my daughter, Anna Clara Jussnitz, should have more children, I make these children my heirs, on condition that, should they be all girls, my eldest grandchild, Leonie Jussnitz, should be the sole possessor of the iron-works; but in case there should be sons, the eldest son is to take the business. The heir, whoever he may be, is to pay to his brothers and sisters their share of the value of the business, according to official appraisal, but these shares are to remain in the business at four per cent. interest.

“As head of the business until the majority of the eventual owner, in case my daughter does not accept the conditions 1 to 3, I appoint my nephew, Herr Ferdinand Frey, engineer. I charge him to pay to my daughter eighteen thousand marks annually, for the necessary expenses of her household, to be paid quarterly. He himself, Herr Ferdinand Frey, will receive a salary of nine thousand marks. He will be bound to undertake and fulfil all the conditions I have imposed upon my daughter in case she had become my heir. He will invest all the surplus income for the benefit of my grandchild, Leonie Jussnitz, or of any other grandchildren that may hereafter be born, in good bonds or real estate; he is enjoined to refuse most decidedly any further demands of my daughter, or her husband, beyond the said sum of eighteen thousand marks annually.

“When the one of my grandchildren to whom the business may eventually come attains his majority, the business shall be made over to him entirely, and this will shall become null and void. In case it is his desire to conduct the business himself, he shall pay to the former administrator, Herr Ferdinand Frey, a life pension of forty-five hundred marks annually.

“(5) I appoint my lawyer, Herr Councillor Klein, my executor, and charge him to see that all these conditions are faithfully carried out, and to advise and counsel my daughter not to shrink from the hard duties which I have laid upon her,

and not to be deterred from obeying the last will of her parents by any obstacles laid in her way by any person whatsoever.

"I especially charge my executor to see that my daughter alone shall have the disposal of her inheritance and her income, as I absolutely refuse to give to her husband any right whatsoever over the principal or interest of my property.

"This is to take effect also in case my daughter's children and not herself should be my heirs.

"(6) I furthermore charge my heirs and my executor to see that all those legacies which I have left for the benefit of private persons, and for churches, schools, and charitable institutions, and which I have written out on a separate paper over my signature, shall be punctually paid.

"(7) The foregoing is my last will and testament, which I have written down with my own hand, and signed and sealed with my own seal.

"I pray God that all may have been done for the best. May He grant that I have chosen the right.

"CLARA FREY, *born* HANSEN.

"IRON WORKS, 'GOTTESSEGEN,'

"*March 23, 18—.*"

There was a death-like silence in the great room when the reading was finished. Jussnitz had sat during the whole time with his arms folded, gazing out of the window as if he were counting the rain-drops which were running down the panes. By his appearance it might have been supposed that he had not heard a word of what had been just uttered so loudly and distinctly.

Antje sat looking at her hands lying clasped in her lap, a prey to the deepest inward torture. Ferdinand Frey did not remove his eyes from her face. His countenance had gradually taken on an expression of anger and compassion, such as men wear who see an animal tortured without being able to

succor it. He had formerly been greatly attached to his cousin, and was even now devoted to her service, and what did he care for all the rest? He was poor enough, but what good would all this confidence do him, and the good income, and the new position? He knew that he would never be happy within these walls, for old memories would cry out at him from every corner.

"Of course you are allowed several weeks for consideration, Frau Jussnitz," began Councillor Klein, after a short pause. "In the meantime everything is in the best hands."

Antje rose and went over to the table on which the will was lying.

"I require no time for consideration, Herr Councillor," she said in a clear, distinct voice, laying both her slender hands on the black table-cover. "I hereby declare that I will accept the inheritance with all the conditions my mother has imposed. I will from henceforth take up my abode *here*, and will endeavor to do my duty as manager of this business as faithfully as possible. I think in this I am acting in accordance with Herr Jussnitz' wishes also."

Again there was a pause.

"Six weeks," said the old family lawyer—"six weeks for consideration, Frau Jussnitz!"

"I am fully determined to conscientiously fulfil the conditions which my mother has imposed," she repeated calmly, but very decidedly, "and I wish to be the owner of 'Gottesegen.' Please draw up the necessary papers at once."

And turning to those present, she added in a

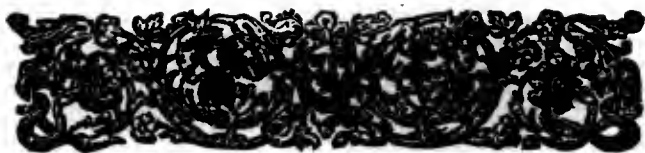
voice choked by tears : " I am sure you will all have patience with me at first, as I am utterly inexperienced, and I take my mother's place with only an honest desire to do all I can to fill it."

And she went up to her cousin and held out her hand. " Ferdinand, I know you understand me ! " Then she pressed Herr Kortmer's hand. " You will help me, will you not ? "

She offered her forehead to the pastor to kiss. " And you, too, will help me, Herr Pastor, will you not ? "

Then, as if overpowered by her emotions, she walked past her husband and left the room.





CHAPTER XXI.

FOR the moment she could think of no better refuge than her parents' little study; there she would be sure of being undisturbed. With regard to all that had to be done in the near future, she only felt that one thing was clear—Leo *must* not stay here! To treat with him face to face was more than she felt able to do, and yet she felt that it would be indelicate to request him through the lawyer to spare her the pain of seeing him. She tried to write to him, but she could not find suitable words. How ought one to write to a husband from whom one is on the point of separating? She laid down her pen again and looked out over the open common that lay there in its Sabbath repose. Ah, if there were only *one* human heart that she could confide in, that would do her the friendly service of being the messenger between herself and him, of telling him that she was determined, irrevocably determined to free him from the fetters that had so weighed him down—only one, only *one* human heart!

She suddenly started up and opened the window.

Dr. Maiberg was just coming out of one of the workmen's houses. She did not call him. She only looked at him, but he read the entreaty in her sad eyes, and came up to the window.

“Do you want anything, Frau Jussnitz?”

"If you can spare me a few moments, Herr Doctor."

"I am quite at your service."

In a few moments he entered the room. It was always rather dark there ; the only window was in a deep niche formed by the thick walls, and there was an iron grating outside it. In the corner there was a small American stove. Antje stood at the writing-table in her sombre mourning dress, with a pale, determined face.

"May I ask you to do me a favor?" she inquired.

He bowed assent.

"You have heard perhaps already from Leo that——"

She turned away her face ; it was so horribly hard to say the words. She could not bring herself to do it. "Has he not said anything to you, Herr Doctor?"

"I haven't the slightest idea what you mean," he replied, looking wonderingly at her trembling figure.

"Leo and I have decided to separate," she hurriedly gasped out.

"That is impossible, Frau Jussnitz," he said, very quietly.

"No. It is true. I see now that the wife of an artist should be quite a different person from such as I am ; not so prosaic, so horribly insignificant. Maiberg, I know that Leo suffers from these qualities of mine. I know it from *his own lips*—he does not love me. It is frightful, this certainty, but easier to bear than my life has been for some time past. Maiberg, do not say anything, I entreat you ; do

not try to persuade me that there is a misunderstanding," she continued. "Do not drag me back into the struggle, from which I have barely come off conqueror. All I ask of you—you are Leo's friend—is to beg him in my name to go away this very evening. I cannot bear to have him here any longer; it is impossible under the circumstances. Tell him that his 'fetters' have fallen off; tell him that he shall be legally free as soon as the first months of deep mourning for mamma have passed. I owe it to her—and *he* does, too—not to desecrate that sacred period with a divorce suit."

"I was not prepared for this," replied Maiberg, gloomily.

"But I *can* not do otherwise. I *can* not!" she cried.

"And what will become of Leo when you forsake him?"

"He will be a happier man than he has been hitherto; he will be a great artist, Herr Doctor."

"Frau Jussnitz," he said, "you are over-excited, your nerves are overstrained. Calm yourself, and I will send Leo away. Do *you* stay here till you recover yourself. Take courage, and one day you will be able to banish these gloomy thoughts and take up again with renewed courage the by no means easy duty of being Leo's wife. But——"

An indescribably sad smile parted her lips.

"Never!" she said in a loud, clear voice. "I shall stay here. I *must* stay here—his path and mine are separated *forever*. But I wish you would say to him, Herr Doctor, that ever since I have known him I have thought only of his happiness. But no——"

she interrupted herself—"do not tell him that. Why should you?"

"God knows whether you are doing right!" returned Maiberg.

"Go," she entreated, "go! If he wishes to take the evening train, he must start soon."

She sank down, as if her strength had suddenly failed her, into the chair in front of the writing-table.

The young doctor left the room with a long, earnest look at her. He had an inward conviction that all was over between these two; that this usually patient, long-suffering woman *could* not act otherwise. But, for Heaven's sake, what had happened? Hilda's image rose before him for a moment, but he indignantly rejected the idea that she was in any way connected with this breach. She was a foolish, coquettish, passionate, spoiled child, but——

"Where is Herr Jussnitz?" he inquired of a housemaid who was crossing the hall with a tray of wine-glasses.

"Herr Jussnitz went to his room after the will was read, and I have not seen him since."

Maiberg looked for him there, but without success. Leo's elegant toilet articles were scattered about, as usual, in artistic disorder. Among them was a sketch-book, and in the corner by the stove was a camp-chair and an artist's umbrella. His trunk, which stood there with its lid thrown back, was quite large, as if its owner had intended to make a prolonged stay. Maiberg knew, however, that Leo, since his marriage, would have considered it impossible to make a journey in search of artistic studies

with a knapsack on his back. He had grown far too aristocratic and self-indulgent for that. But in spite of this the presence of these objects gave Maiberg a feeling of comfort. *He*, at least, did not seem to be inexorable. Or had he no suspicion that this "utter nonentity" of a wife did, after all, possess a heart, and with this heart—force of character and a strong will, and true womanly pride?

Maiberg looked for his friend through all the rooms, then in the garden, and at length he came back to the house. In the sitting-room the company of mourners were partaking of a simple evening meal. The two old aunts had red eyes in spite of their joy over the nice little legacy which would make it possible for them to pay the dog-tax for their beloved Moppel without anxious calculations and without feeling guilty of too great an extravagance. They were holding each other's hands and praising the dead woman in every possible way. But no one here had seen Jussnitz.

Maiberg even looked into the counting-room, but there stood Herr Kortmer at his desk, writing, still in his suit of solemn black. When he heard a sound behind him, he turned round, and, perceiving the young doctor, he said, in some confusion: "I was only writing out the advertisement of the change of firm, Herr Doctor. It must be printed at once."

"What?" said Maiberg. "Have the iron-works changed hands?"

A smile like sunshine amidst dark clouds passed over the old man's face.

"Henceforth we shall sign: 'Christopher Gottlob

Frey's Successor.' Well, and who do you think is the successor, Herr Doctor? It is our child! If you had only seen her as she stood up before the lawyer and said, quite simply and decidedly: 'I shall remain here!' Ah, she has a mind of her own, and independence. She is a real Frey, and I can assure you that is a good thing for the business."

"Indeed? Then Frau Antje is to be the chief?"

"Frau Antje *is* chief."

"Can you not tell me where I can find Jussnitz?" inquired Maiberg.

"Herr Jussnitz? H'm! He didn't hear much in the will that was satisfactory to him. Well, he couldn't expect anything better, Herr Doctor, for my late mistress couldn't bear to die, she was so anxious on his account. But you want to know where he is? Dear me, where should a man like him be? He has gone to walk, probably, studying lights and moods and what not in the woods along the river. I don't know, but I suppose that is where he is." And he went back to his advertisement. 'In future we shall sign: 'Christopher Gottlob 'Frey's Successor.'"

Maiberg nodded to the old man. It had suddenly occurred to him that Jussnitz might be in the nursery. Running up two steps at a time, he mounted the stairs and was presently knocking at the door of the room he knew was assigned to Hilda and the child.

"Come in!" was called out in a low tone, and he opened the door. It was almost dark in the room, or at least it seemed so to him as he came in from the light hall.

"Are you here, Fräulein von Zweidorf?"

"Yes," came the reply from a corner of the sofa ;
"please walk softly, the baby is asleep."

"And what are you doing here in the dark?"

"I am worrying myself. I want to go away."

"Where?"

"Anywhere, to get away from here."

"But no one keeps you here," he said.

"No, but I cannot do what I like. Please ask Frau Jussnitz to let me go."

"Anywhere?" he repeated gently. It had such a sad sound. "Do you know," he continued, obeying a sudden impulse, "that Frau Jussnitz is going to stay here forever?"

"Forever?" she repeated incredulously. "And what does *he* say to that?"

"He?"

"Yes—he!"

"He is not going to stay here."

Maiberg heard suddenly a gasping, deep-drawn breath.

"And where is he going to stay?" she asked in a hoarse tone.

"Anywhere!" he replied.

She started up from the sofa, and as she bent toward him, in spite of the darkness, he could see the young girl's unnaturally large, anxious eyes. "What do you mean by that?" she gasped out, clutching at his arm with her trembling hand.

"It means that two persons are about to separate for all eternity."

She sank back with a low, wailing cry.

"And on my account, on my account!"

Maiberg stood gazing at her without moving. So it was really so ! Convulsive sobs shook the girl's whole frame ; she cried as only a child can cry, in a heart-breaking, piteous fashion,—a child who has been too severely punished, and whose self-respect has been deeply injured. And, all at once, the slender young figure sank on her knees before the young man, two hot feverish hands clasped his, and in the midst of her sobs she gasped out the words : “ Oh, I did not realize what I was doing. I only meant—oh, don't think so badly of me—I—O God, I cannot say it—oh, do beg Frau Jussnitz to listen to me—I swear to you I——”

The rest was choked by her sobs.

He held the trembling little hands firmly in his own ; her wet cheek rested on his right hand, and he had not the heart to thrust it away.

“ Hilda, you love him, do you not ? ”

“ Yes—I did love him at that time when he was painting me in his city studio, before I knew he was married. It was so sweet—ah, and I was so unhappy when I found out——”

“ And now ? ”

She made no reply ; she only shook her head violently.

“ You were playing with him, Fräulein Hilda ; I saw it with my own eyes.”

There was silence for a while. “ Yes,” she said then.

“ You wished to make it plain that—but you did not realize what you were doing, did you ? ”

“ Yes, I did ! ” was the answer, scarcely above her breath.

"For Heaven's sake ! But were you not sorry for his wife ?"

"No," she replied. "I thought it was true what they all said, that she had no ideas beyond her housekeeping. She was always so different from the others. Oh, I would give my life if I had never seen him." And she began to sob again.

Maiberg felt strangely moved. He could not help recalling the wistful look with which she had caught at his arm that evening at Barrenberg's, as if entreating his aid.

"Poor, foolish little child !" he murmured.

"What do you think ? For Heaven's sake, Herr Doctor, tell me what I shall do. People will ask why they have separated—my God ! if my name should be mentioned ! Dear Herr Doctor, my father would shoot me dead, my father is so frightfully strict about such matters, and—he is quite right, too."

"Your father is very fond of you ?"

"Yes, yes," she replied, impulsively ; "he loves me, and he is so good, and I would rather die than stand up before him and see his eyes fixed on me so full of grief and reproach ; and it would be the best thing for me."

Her head sank down upon his hand again, and once more he felt the streaming tears.

"Can they say anything against me ? I did wrong, but I have not been wicked, dear Herr Doctor," she sobbed.

"I am afraid you can hardly escape," he remarked, quietly.

She ceased sobbing in sheer terror. "But whv

did she bring me here with her? Why did she not turn me out of the house?" she said at length.

He put his hand on her shoulder. "Because Frau Antje has a noble nature," he said, slowly; "because she would not expose *her* to reproach who would one day fill her place. Did you not understand that?"

Hilda uttered a low cry, and started up from the floor. "I—in her place? Oh, never, never! From the very moment I heard that he had a wife, I"—she hesitated for a fitting word—"hated him! No—not exactly that—at first—I don't know how it was, it was all so dreadful—but afterward I hated him, hated him with all my might—and now——"

"Hilda!" he said, reprovingly.

She was quiet for a while; nothing was audible but her hurried breathing.

"I will speak to her," she said at length in a determined tone, "and then I will go away, far away—to England—or, farther still, to America!" And as if an idea had suddenly occurred to her, she added: "Give me a recommendation for Brazil—you were there a long time."

"And what will you do in Brazil?" he asked in a tone of fatherly mildness.

"Earn my living! So many girls go to foreign lands."

He smiled and said: "For the present you will stay *here*. It is the only thing you can do now. I have no other advice to give you. I will speak to Frau Antje, not you; but this is not the proper time to choose. And now good-night, Fräulein Hilda"

—he had suddenly grown very formal—“try to calm yourself.”

When he had opened the door to leave the room, he turned round again, and saw Hilda standing in the stream of light that came in from the hall. Her wonderful eyes were fixed on him with a helpless, despairing expression, and her loosened hair hung heavily about her tearful face.

He was shocked at the sight. “Keep up a good heart, Fräulein Hilda!” he said, earnestly, but his heart began to beat more rapidly, and he suddenly felt as if he would like to draw the foolish little thing, who had done so much harm in her passionate resentment, close to his breast and tell her how sorry he felt for her. Then he became conscious that he had stood there too long, and he bowed to her and shut the door, much more violently than one usually shuts the door of a room where a baby is asleep.

When he was outside his face took on an expression of vexation. “Old fellow,” he said to himself, “don’t be a fool! She is not—not at all what you want, do you understand? Be sensible; give your message to Leo, and then think about packing your trunk, for this is no place for you.”



CHAPTER XXII.

MAIBERG knocked at Leo's chamber door.

"Come in," was the reply, and he entered. He received a somewhat ironical bow in return for his "Good evening." Léo was in his dressing-gown, and a large glass half-filled with hot punch stood on the table in front of the lamp. In the corner lay a heap of wet clothes, from which a little stream of water was running down over the well-scoured floor.

"What is this?" inquired Maiberg.

'Water, pure water, from the little stream out there.'

"Have you had an accident? Did you slip on the boards, or——?"

"I did not do *that*, but I had an accident in connection with those boards. I hope you will utilize your new position as adviser to the mistress of 'Gottessegen' by doing a good deed, and will insist upon it that those confounded boards shall be taken away. Drunken men, or those who are subject to giddiness, cannot possibly cross them without danger. As future Æsculapius to the mines, it is your bounden duty to look out for the bodily welfare of those confided to your care. I suppose I am not mistaken in taking it for granted that your endless interview with the chief of the works this afternoon

was for the purpose of settling this matter? I am sure I cannot imagine what else of importance you could have to discuss with her. The Frau Bergrath is now already resting from her labors, and no longer requires your assistance."

During this speech Maiberg had gazed silently at his friend—who was walking up and down like a caged lion—with eyes that grew more and more anxious the more violent Leo grew.

"Leo," he said, at length, "will you not sit down?"

"It is very kind of you to offer me a chair in this house; it is quite in accordance with your new position, which I was just talking about."

Maiberg paid no attention to this remark, but drew forward a chair in front of Leo, who had thrown himself down on the sofa, and seating himself, he said: "I have something to say to you, Leo. I wish you would imagine we were as we used to be, when you did not dislike me but trusted in me."

"Perhaps you bring me a message from my wife?"

"Yes, Leo; and now be once more the mild, reasonable, and just person you used to be."

"You seem to consider me rather weak in intellect at present?"

Maiberg made no reply to this. He only said, quietly: "Your wife begs that you will leave Oberrode, as at present she does not feel able to attend to the settlement of all these details which your strained relations unfortunately require. She begs that you will have patience until the first days of mourning for her mother have passed."

Leo Jussnitz looked fixedly at the speaker for a moment, and then he burst into a loud, convulsive laugh.

"I would advise you, Leo," continued Maiberg, quite unmoved, "to let her have her way. In the condition in which you both are at present—you in a state of extreme irritation; she, in one of iron determination—it will be better for you to avoid each other. Let some little time pass, and then, perhaps—who knows?—there may be found some way out of it."

Leo had grown perfectly calm. "So that is why I got such a curt refusal to my humble request for an audience," he said at length. "She will not see me! She is right; it is better that I should go."

"No; she certainly will not, Leo."

Leo got up and began to resume his walk up and down the room. Maiberg remained seated, playing with the fringe of the table-cloth. He did not like to look at the pale face of the man who had been the dearest friend of his youth. He knew there would be a violent scene, he was so well acquainted with his character.

"Perhaps you will now undertake your long-planned journey to Italy, Leo?" he began again.

"How beautifully you have arranged it all!" was the sarcastic reply. "Why don't you put me, without more ado, on board an out-going ship, as people are in the habit of doing with those whom they find in their way? I suppose you two have also settled the precise amount that will enable me to set myself up in business when I get there, eh?"

"The proposal to go to Italy came from me alone,

Leo," said Maiberg. "Your wife has not made the slightest attempt to advise you."

The agitated man suddenly stopped in front of his friend ; a small blue vein in his forehead stood out prominently, and he breathed with difficulty.

"Wolf," he began slowly, his voice growing more loud and excited as he went on, "Wolf, what did I write to you a while ago ? Did I say too much about my wife ? She is petty, she is foolish, she is revengeful, revengeful to the last degree, and—she is the wife of an artist, *she*——"

And he struck his forehead with the palm of his hand and laughed.

"Leo !" exclaimed his friend, reproachfully.

"Be silent," cried the irritated man. "I know her better than you do ! Do you know what induces her to bury herself alive here ? In the first place it is jealousy, the meanest, the most pitiful jealousy. She wishes to force me to live in this solitude because here she is hardly likely to find any woman who would throw her into the shade ; and then—it is that wretched mercenary spirit of hers—she thinks she can save up her pennies here as her mother did before her. Here with the best will in the world you can't spend money. You do not need to tell me what sort of spirit rules under this roof. And it is here that I sought the companion of my life, and thought if she were willing to give herself to me, what could she care for the miserable money ! I believed in a warm, hearty, mutual interchange, Wolf—ah, it is too pitiful ! Why did I prove such a wretched shot ? Let her stay here in the devil's name, and watch over her

money-bags like a dragon. Do what you like—but let me get away from here as soon as possible.”

Maiberg suffered him to go on without interruption ; and when he had finished he made no attempt at soothing him. Any defence of his wife now would only have been pouring oil on the flames.

“If you will allow it, Leo, I will go with you.”

“Much obliged ! Don’t disturb yourself. Your presence here probably cannot be dispensed with.”

“I have no more to do here, Leo. I should go to-morrow morning, at any rate.”

“Go—whenever you like !”

“Certainly ! May I ask you one question, Leo ?”

“You may ask. I cannot say that I will answer it.”

“What was your idea about Hildegarde von Zweidorf ?”

The painter stopped and drew a deep breath. “Hilda ?” he gasped out. “Yes, another victim to a petty nature ! Dragged into this wilderness and shut up in the nursery ! To clip the wings of a creature born to fly among the clouds like an eagle, that is the good work of the so-called reasonable, upright, virtuous housewife ! Perhaps she has a situation all ready for her in the counting-house, or in the kitchen, very likely. The poor thing is quite powerless in her clutches, for she spied upon us as I, in my emotion at the thought of parting with the only creature in the world who cast a little sunlight on my path, kissed the girl’s hand a little more warmly than fashion permits. That—oh, bah ! It is not worth speaking about. I can do nothing for her now—nothing !”

And again that blue vein swelled on his forehead.

"Why do you look at me like that?" he cried to his friend. "Do me the only favor in your power, and leave me. I will not see any of you again; not one of you. Do you understand? But tell my wife that I am *glad* to go; that I ~~am~~ delighted to consent to a separation. That from this moment I consider myself a *free* man, and I only regret that I cannot give her back every penny that her folly in marrying *me* has cost her! Perhaps she may get some Gradgrind for her second husband, who will help her to get back what she lost through the first. I hope so with all my heart."

He threw off his dressing-gown, snatched a coat from the hook, took up an overcoat off the chair, and his hat. It was a soft felt hat, dripping with water.

"For Heaven's sake, Leo, where are you going? Man, don't lose your head entirely!"

But Jussnitz only shrugged his shoulders and marched out of the door.

Maiberg hurried into his own room to get his fur coat and hat. He dared not let him go like this.

Leo rushed along the corridor. He had already reached the staircase, when he turned round, after a moment's hesitation, and walked quickly back to the nursery. A short knock at the door, a turn of the knob, and, without waiting for an answer, he was inside.

"Who is it?" called out Hilda.

"I, Leo Jussnitz!" replied a voice which she would hardly have recognized, so hoarse was it.

The young girl started up and uttered a low cry

"*You?*"

"To be sure ! I might say I had come to say good-by to my child, but why should I tell a falsehood? I wish to say good-by to *you*. I wish to tell you how much I regret—I wish to ask your pardon, Hilda."

She had lighted a lamp with her trembling hands. He could now see her tear-stained face and her eyes flashing with anger.

"I do not recall anything that I have to forgive, Herr Jussnitz," she replied, coldly. "You have probably made a mistake and wish to offer your apologies to your wife."

He looked at her in surprise. "You have been schooled admirably," he said, "but you must not imagine that I shall take this lofty reproof in earnest."

"Why not ?"

"Because your eyes told me a very different story only a few days ago."

A deep flush overspread her face, and the small hands were clenched ; her pride and mortification almost robbed her of her senses.

"My eyes? My eyes have now and never had anything to say to you !" she cried, vehemently.

"Nothing—nothing at all?" he said, mockingly.

Her breath came quickly, the tears rolled down her cheeks. She determined that, cost what it might, she would now and forever disabuse him of the idea that she had ever felt the slightest interest in him.

"You were always perfectly indifferent to me !" she gasped out.

He gave a short laugh and made her a low bow.

"Why, then, this passionate denial? Do not agitate yourself!" he said. "I believe you, Hilda, since you wish it to be so. I give you my word, I believe you, until you——"

"But it is so, it is really so!" she interposed.

"I am convinced of it," he said, sarcastically. "Nearly a week has passed since that evening in Sibyllenburg—of course *you* have forgotten all about it. I have been described to you as a monster of iniquity, to whom nothing in the world is sacred; they have been preaching to you about morals and decency and Mrs. Grundy, and—you are a good, obedient child. It is quite right of you; I wish you all sorts of happiness as a reward for your docility. Farewell!"

"No one has said a word about you, and no one has given me advice!" cried the girl, quite beside herself. "And if you wish to hear the exact truth, I *made* my eyes lie to you on purpose to revenge myself on you. It was only a whim, a madness, if you like, of mine, for what can you possibly be to me? I have loved another man for a long, long time. There, now, you know the truth!"

He took up his hat, which he had let fall. The candle cast its flickering light on his pale, quivering features, and on the girl who, covering her face with both hands, had turned her back on him and stood there trembling all over.

"Another, Hilda?" he exclaimed.

She gave a sob as she bent her head.

"Maiberg?" he asked, and as she made no reply, he said: "Of course it is Maiberg."

He suddenly laughed aloud.

"Well, then—good luck to you, Hilda! Farewell! I—surprises come to us all now and then. My heartiest congratulations."

All this was uttered between outbursts of the same loud laughter, which sounded strangely out of place within these walls from which the dead had just been carried out. Still laughing, he left the room, where the terrified cries of the child mingled with the sobs of the young girl, and still laughing, he walked along the corridor and reached the staircase.

There he met Maiberg coming hurriedly up the stairs.

"I have been looking for you everywhere, Leo."

The laughter ceased; the painter measured his friend from head to foot.

"You are a devilish fellow, Maiberg," he cried, "but I don't grudge you your good fortune; I was never a dog in the manger. I only pity you for having the misery of such a choice. Well, good-by; don't trouble yourself about me. You might be missed here where there are so many tears in beautiful eyes to be wiped away."

He was about to pass his friend, but his steps were arrested by a confused murmur of voices coming up from the hall below; a shrill woman's voice rose above all the rest. In the large, dimly-lighted hall several people had collected round a poor woman, who shrieked all the louder the more they tried to soothe her.

"Let the man who pulled him out of the water," she cried, "give him the money to buy his gin, too, for he can't live without it!"

Leo stopped short half-way downstairs.

"There, you see, Wolf, that is just my luck ! I make a mess of it, even when I risk my life for another."

"Sir," screamed the woman, when she perceived Leo, "I would have thanked you on my knees if you had only let him drown ! It would have been the best thing that could happen to him, and—I—I might have had a few years of comfort still. Oh, don't laugh," she continued, as Leo gave a short laugh. "You don't any of you here know what it is to be chained to a drunken sot from the time you were eighteen ! You don't know what a misery it is to see a person you are fond of going down into shame and degradation ; you don't know what it is to have to give up all your hard-earned money and see it squandered in bad company ; nor what it is to give kindness and get blows in return—always a blow and abuse—and to be told that you are the curse of a man, when you would have been ready to lie down and let him walk over you ! You don't know how awful it is, if you have known better days, and yet you go sinking deeper and deeper in vileness and misery, and you have children, too, that you can't save !" And she covered her face with her clenched fists.

"And why," said Leo's voice, with a sneer, "do you treat us to a scene like this, you most amiable of wives ? Take yourself off !—ah ! yes," he broke off, suddenly ; "I forgot——"

The woman threw her torn shawl over her head, with a dull groan.

"Ah, sir," she sobbed, "I ought to thank you

for risking your life for the miserable wretch, but I can't. Don't think me a wicked woman ; I was too good to him—I was too fond of him. It is no use to pardon everything out of pure love, even wrong things. If I had only scolded him in the first place—if I had threatened to leave him—it would have been much better. But I thought it would vex him, and he was the *master*, and so I only cried by myself, though it was my duty to keep him in the straight path.”

The poor woman's self-accusation sounded so true and so sad that no one present felt like turning her out forcibly.

Maiberg hastened to put a few silver pieces into her trembling hand.

“There, now go,” he said, leading her toward the door ; “by and by I will come and talk to you.”

“God reward you ! God reward you !” cried the poor creature, and when she reached the outer door she turned round and nodded gratefully with her haggard, yellow face to the young physician. Then she was suddenly swallowed up in the darkness outside, as if she feared her treasure would be taken from her. She vanished to go and procure for the miserable wretch whom she loved, the cordial for which he longed.

Antje stood, forgotten by every one, on the threshold of the little study, the door of which was hidden by the staircase. Her eyes were fixed on the man who, at this moment, was about to leave her forever. She had heard the woman's words, and understood that Leo had saved a man from drowning ; her heart beat violently at the thought

that he himself might so easily have been drowned, and she felt that this act of her husband's was like balm to the wound which he had inflicted upon her.

He moved forward into the hall ; the funeral guests, who had risen from the supper-table when they heard the noise, the servant-maids, the porter, and coachman had gone away, and only Maiberg, Jussnitz, and a man from the counting-house were now talking together. Antje saw the latter hand a letter and a telegram to Leo ; she saw him put them both into his pocket with an effort at carelessness, and heard him say :

“ I will send you my address in a few days.”

Then he and Maiberg moved toward the door.

The young wife leaned against the door-post ; her eyes were strangely wide and fixed. When two people separate like this they do not say farewell ; it could not be borne. She saw the door open ; she felt the cold, damp air blowing in, saw the door shut behind him—and he was gone.

Suddenly her limbs failed her ; she staggered back into the little room, and shutting the door with all the strength she could summon, she sank upon her knees.

It was all over now—all over !

She felt nothing but a dull ache at her heart and in her head. She never knew how long she lay there. At length she sat up and dragged herself over to the writing-table and laid her head down on the baize-covered surface.

She kept thinking, thinking all manner of confused thoughts—that she envied the woman who could give a poisonous cordial to the man she loved ;

that Leo might have been drowned in his work of mercy, and she could not have borne it to stand beside his dead body without ever having spoken a word of reconciliation. And she thought that that poor woman was better than she, for she had clung to the man to whom she had pledged her faith, in spite of misery and abuse.

And then she started up. No! A thousand times no! She *could* not do otherwise; she ought not to keep him beside her; she was only a chain to drag him down—his chain—and she could not pass a moment beside him without being forced to feel how unhappy she made him, how her presence weighed upon him! No, no! It was all over, it must be all over!

Outside she heard a light step at her door.

"Frau Jussnitz!" said a clear voice.

She did not stir.

"Only one word, Frau Jussnitz! Please, please!"

Antje held her breath and looked gloomily at the door. The handle moved slightly. In vain; the door was locked, and the steps reluctantly retreated.

Antje leaned her weary head on her hand again. At last she roused herself and rang for the housemaid. The latter came in inquiring if Fräulein von Zweidorf was here.

"No."

"Good Heavens, we have been looking all over the house for her, and we cannot find her anywhere. And the master has gone away, and the Herr Doctor, too."

The young wife made no reply. She calmly or-

dered the girl to look after the child, and then went downstairs. In the hall she met Maiberg.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

"I have been to see that unlucky drunkard," he replied, with a slight touch of irony. "He just died before my eyes, and so his wife has her wish. But I never witnessed a more heart-breaking burst of grief than hers when I told her it was all over."

Antje nodded with a strange look. "And where is he?" she asked at length.

Maiberg sighed.

"Leo was to wait for me before the house in which the dead man lay, but when I came back he was gone. One of the miners saw him on the high-road. I am going to have a horse saddled and ride after him; I promised him I would."

She did not look at him. "And where is *she*?" she asked.

"Who?"

"Hildegarde; we have been looking for her everywhere."

Then she turned to shake hands with her cousin, who had just come up to say good-by.

"Cousin, command me if you ever need my services," he said.

"Thank you! Are you going to J——?"

"No; through Oberrode, past the cliffs."

She nodded wearily. "A safe home-coming, Ferdinand!"

Maiberg hurried past her up the staircase, but Hildegarde's room was vacant—and the night outside was so dark and stormy, and she was so young, so alone, so unprotected! Of course she had gone,

with her usual impulsiveness. But where had she gone ?

He lighted a candle and looked about for a note or something which might give him a clue, but in vain. He rushed into his own room—it was a corner-room. The spring storm beat against the shutters, and the columns of fire from the works shed a peculiar red, flickering light over it. He stopped in the middle of the room and listened to the howling of the wind. Good Heavens, where was that thoughtless child in this dreadful night ? He pulled up the overcoat, which he had half thrown off, with a sudden jerk over his shoulders. The horse must be saddled by this time ; perhaps he might overtake her on the high-road, with—him ? In the deepest agitation he caught up his hat, but something moved in the dark corner by the window, and a slender figure glided toward him.

“Hilda !” he cried out. By the flickering light from outside, he could see the same pale, despairing face she had worn before.

“Good God, Hilda, to what misconstructions you expose yourself !” he said, reprovingly, as she hung down her head.

“I was afraid,” she said in a low tone ; “where could I go ?”

“And so you came to me ?”

He threw off his overcoat and flung his hat down on the table.

“To whom could I go ?” she asked, as if it were quite a matter of course that she should take refuge with him. “When I knocked at Frau Antje’s door, she would not let me in.”

He took her trembling hands in his. They were cold as ice.

"To whom could you go?" he repeated, softly. But as he heard steps outside in the corridor, he started and looked at the door. "You must go straight to your own room," he whispered, dropping her hands.

She drew away from him, and turning her back, she covered her glowing face with her hands.

"Hilda," he continued in a suppressed voice, "even you can understand that no one must find you here. What did you want of me? Speak quickly, for one of the servants may come in at any moment."

"Good Heavens, what have I done now?" she cried. "Oh, if you only knew all! Have I then *no* refuge? I want nothing but to be allowed to go away, only to go away from here!"

"Yes, you shall go if you like. But you cannot go this evening, you silly child."

"But to-morrow—to-morrow! Please, please!"

"To-morrow, or the next day. Now I must go and look for Jussnitz; then I shall come back once more in any case—and then—will you be reasonable?"

She nodded. She was standing before him again, crying softly.

"What will become of you, Hilda, without a firm, faithful hand to guide you?" he said, gently.

"Oh, if I could only be different!" she sobbed. And, as if to prove that this "being different" was not to be hoped for very soon, she rushed thoughtlessly out of the room. Outside, she looked about

on all sides like a frightened deer. Thank God, the corridor was empty ! She slipped across into her own room, shut the door noiselessly behind her, and stood still, breathing quickly. Then she groped her way to the sofa, crouched down in a corner of it, and burst into a passion of tears ; but she was no longer afraid.

When a few minutes later she heard, between the howling of the wind and the strokes of the hammers, the clattering hoofs of a galloping horse, she raised her head and clasped her hands. Maiberg came back toward morning. He had not found Leo, either at the station or at any of the inns in the little watering-place near by. He must have gone through the woods to another station on the south side of the mountains.

Maiberg went to bed tired to death. "Poor, foolish fellow !" he murmured. "How can a man throw away his happiness like that?"





CHAPTER XXIII.

THE storm was raging in the leafless beech-woods ; it shook the tops of the old trees till they bent and creaked, occasionally flung a dead bough to the ground, where it fell with a crash among the underbrush, and howled and whistled through the air in every imaginable key.

It was the sort of weather when the people of the Harz say the Wild Huntsman traverses his domain with his uncanny crew, weather in which one would not turn a dog from the door, much less a man.

But the wild night seemed to have no terrors for the man who, avoiding the travelled carriage road, was climbing the steep woodland path, still covered with snow, which led up from the valley where the iron-works were situated ; and he seemed to be perfectly acquainted with this region. Up here the snow still covered the ground, and the pale moon shed a faint light over the landscape, though now and then, when the storm-driven clouds passed over the moon, the woods were all blended together in one dark mass. But this did not last long, and then the black trunks of the huge trees stood out all the more distinctly from the snowy background.

It is not one of those spring nights when the hunter creeps out after the shy mountain cock ; it is still winter up here, and more like the nights when poachers lurk behind the great tree-trunks

and spread out their snares for their prey. And there is plenty of game here. When the forester in his little house on the high plateau hears a shot, he mutters an oath in his pillows, and fancies himself sending a bullet after the vile poachers, which will put an end to their midnight forays forever. For who else would be shooting at this time of night?

The man who had been walking on so rapidly stopped for a moment and lifted his hat from his burning forehead.

"It would be the best thing I could do!" he muttered under his breath. His life was an utter failure in any case; he had been disappointed in everything! He had failed in everything. Even the slightest faithfulness and devotion, such as the most miserable woman feels for the companion of her life, had been denied him.

She had sent him away! Where he went was a matter of indifference to her, so long as he went out of her sight!

.
From the iron-works, "Gottessegen," to the forest-house, was a walk of an hour and a half, but the person accomplishing the distance in that time must be a good walker. The Frau Försterin, with the reddish-gold hair, always took much longer to reach Oberrode; she had such little feet and wore such dainty shoes. She had been down there to-day, ostensibly to attend the funeral, but in reality to see Herr Jussnitz, who had painted her once so beautifully that she had appeared in all the newspapers. Then he had been such a bright, merry young fellow. She had come home in the twilight,

and now she was sitting after supper in the hot little parlor, telling her husband, who sat smoking on the bench by the stove, how very much changed Herr Jussnitz was, that he did not look in the least like himself, he looked so proud and so indifferent. As she talked she went on caressing "Lola," a little dachshund with intelligent eyes and lively ways, like her mistress, and a reddish-brown coat, just the color of her mistress's hair.

The forester shook his head. "Ah, I am sorry for that ; his riches haven't done him much good."

"I only wish *I* had some of them," she laughed. "Eh, Lola, we would soon learn how to ride in a coach ! And I would buy you a sky-blue neck ribbon, Lola ; that is our color."

"You shouldn't always be chattering such nonsense," said the grave-looking man with the weather-beaten face.

"Oh, good gracious," she continued, notwithstanding, "how lucky Frau Jussnitz is !"

"You ought to have married a rich man, then——"

"Yes, so I ought—if it hadn't been for that stupid Oberrode shooting-match !"

At this her husband began to smile.

"And if you hadn't been made king of the festival," she continued. "But I fell in love with you, and when I danced with you I felt as if I were a real queen. So silly ! And the next day all the splendor was over."

"But not the love," he said.

"Oh, well, I suppose you know," she pouted.

"Yes, yes," he said ; "we got engaged much too quickly. If I had only known then what a little

wild-cat it was I had caught, I would have let you go."

"Oh, would you, though!"

"Well, there is the door; you can go now—and be quick about it!" he laughed, and standing up he clapped his hands as if he were frightening off a chicken.

"Good-by, then!" she cried, and with one bound she was at the door. "Come, Lola!"

All the other dogs, which were lying asleep in front of the oven, were wakened by Lola's barking, and added their noise to the laughter of the forester and the merry scolding of his wife. He caught her round the waist and kissed her, and between the kisses he kept saying: "Go, then! Why don't you go?"

"Good Heavens, do quiet those dogs!" she cried. "It is enough to drive one mad."

But the dogs forced their way past the couple and rushed to the door.

"There is some one there," said the forester, releasing his wife.

She seized the lamp and stood in the doorway of the room. Her husband in the mean time had opened the outer door, but he started back in amazement, and his wife nearly dropped her lamp in her surprise.

"Herr Jussnitz!" they both exclaimed in a breath. "Good Heavens, in this weather and so late! What is the matter? Have you lost your way?"

"Can you put me up for the night?" he inquired.

"Why, to be sure, Herr Jussnitz!"

"Well, then, give me my old room till morning, and some schnapps, if you can, for my teeth are chattering with the cold."

They led the way into the parlor, and he sat down on a bench in front of the stove; the dogs sniffed at his clothes; the beech logs crackled as they burned, and "Frau Dorchén" brought out the bottle of Nordhäuser, and the stout little glasses from the wall-cupboard.

He caught at it eagerly and drank it down.

"You know how to make yourselves comfortable up here," he said.

"I should just like to know what sent you up here to-night," said the curious woman. "It isn't nearly time yet for the mountain cocks with all this snow."

"Ask no questions, but get the room ready for Herr Jussnitz, and make a fire there," said the forester.

And when she had left the room, he sat still in his chair; he could see that something had gone wrong with his belated guest. It was no secret in the neighborhood that he and his mother-in-law had not been on the best of terms, and Heaven only knew what there might have been in the will. Dorchén had told him that it was to be read immediately after the funeral.

"You do not look very well, Herr Jussnitz."

"And my looks do not belie me, my dear Wend. I am not very well," replied the other.

"Dora will soon have your room ready."

And, in fact, the young wife's slippers were even then heard clattering on the stairs.

"It is all ready, Herr Jussnitz," she called from the door.

He rose and shook hands with the forester. "Good-night, Wend!"

Frau Dora lighted him upstairs. "It's a good while since you slept a night here, Herr Jussnitz," she laughed. "You must stoop a little; you have not been used to such low doors lately. I am sure in your castle at home they are as high and as wide as our whole house. Aren't they, now?"

He was already in the tiny room. As he turned round to say "Good-night" he saw her face blanch suddenly, and she put her hand to her heart. He understood. She was thinking that he had gone out of this room that last time to meet with that accident in the woods.

"Good-night," she stammered. "And, Herr Jussnitz, if you should be ill, you will wake us—you know we sleep just under you—you look so miserable."

"Oh, do not distress yourself," he replied; "I shall not need anything."

She went away reluctantly. He heard her descend the stairs, and it seemed to him as if something slipped past her, forced itself through the crack of the door, and filled the little room with strange wailings and laments. Was it memory?

He seated himself on the edge of the bed when he had put out the light. Even then he could see everything so distinctly in the moonlight. He saw the whitewashed walls and the little mirror over the commode, behind which were a few peacock's feathers. He knew every one of the little twisted deer's

horns beside it, and he saw the charcoal sketches on the wall, the work of various master hands, representing all manner of whimsical hunting adventures. The forester guarded them as he would the costliest paintings. Leo himself had sketched the young Försterin, riding toward the Brocken on her broomstick, with Lola in her lap, who was howling at the moon. How the merry little woman had laughed when she saw it! And *how* he had painted her afterward, and *how* successful the picture had been! And how good the little cheeses tasted in the pauses for luncheon, and the brown, foaming beer! Ah, that was life!

He seems to see gleaming, golden rays stretching out before his eyes. He raises his hand to catch the shimmer—but it is gone. And he is sitting here again, in the twilight of an autumn evening two years later—his heart empty, his brain empty, and his pockets, too. He can succeed in nothing. The spring of his life seems broken. He has lost his ideal—lost it in the dissipations of the great city, in idle lounging. He has spent his money, a great deal of money, and he has debts and no prospect of ever paying them. He is bankrupt, body and soul! And downstairs stands the gun-rack of the forester, and there is not a soul to be seen in the forest, far and wide.

His memory brings back vividly the bouquet that Frau Dorchen had placed on the commode that day—red mountain-ash berries, yellow leaves, and green pine-branches. But he is no longer here, and far away outside a shot is heard. . . .

The man sitting on the edge of the bed shakes

with a feverish chill. "Now the misery is only just beginning!" he says to himself. He sees himself waking in a strange room, he hears a wonderfully regular knocking and hammering, the bed and the curtains are snowy white, and the sunlight is shining in through the windows. He smells the odor of violets. On his coverlid lies a little bunch of the blue blossoms, and beside the couch in the deep arm-chair reposes in deep slumber a blond, girlish head.

What a soft, childish face! He puts out his hand for the flowers, awkwardly, clumsily, for his chest pains him. A low groan wakens the girl; a pair of clear, greenish eyes, unfathomable as the sea itself, gaze at him, and suddenly the face is overspread with a deep blush. She starts up and says she will call her mother.

All the comfortable sensations of convalescence come over him once more; the first attempt at walking, the enchanting green of the trees, the spring air in the mountains—all this comes back to him. And then he sees himself walking in the garden leaning on the arm of the young girl. The sky above him is deep blue, and the sun shines warmly on the gravel of the garden walks; the water foams and rages over the dam, and in the beds bloom the yellow and purple crocuses. He does not know himself how it all came about, but all at once he has asked her if she will be *his*. And then he heard a "Yes," a timid but firm "Yes."

And now he feels again that strange sensation that never left him from that moment, the feeling that comes over a man when he feels under obligations to another and cannot show himself sufficiently

appreciative. It is a stupid feeling, and it makes him irritable and nervous and unjust. It is too hard to endure magnanimity, too frightfully hard ; one is almost ready to hate the person to whom one is so much indebted, especially when one believes the giver to be so far beneath one in intellect, so far beneath——

Strange, the more he received, the more irritable he grew ! Absurd ! She was his *wife*, and she had said to him a thousand times, "What is mine is yours." And yet, and yet ! In Heaven's name, had he put nothing at all into the scale, then ? His name, his honorable name, and—nothing more. Actually, there *was* nothing more—nothing ! He had not even been successful in his pictures, because—because *she* had dragged him down into the prose of life. It was all *her* fault.

He was only glad that he had told her, told her brutally, that she had been only a chain to weigh him down—in spite of her wealth. That wretched drunkard's wife was a heroine beside her ; she had had the strength to keep her faith to the end in spite of everything. But *he* had been turned out.

He gave a short laugh.

"Really, it was poetical justice for her to dismiss me, that I must admit. I should hardly have given her credit for so much spirit. Thank God !"

He began to yawn and stretch like a person released from a heavy chain, but he had no pleasant feeling of freedom. There is no freedom without money, and he would rather starve than take a penny of the alms that she would be sure to offer him.

But where should he go ? What should he do ?

He began to undress, and as usual he took his sketch-book and pocket-book out of his jacket pocket. There were the letter, and the telegram, too, which he had received just as he was leaving the iron-works ; moreover, there was the elegant pocket revolver, and here at last was the little red bow which he had been carrying about with him for the past week. The dark head in whose hair this bow had nestled rose before him with charming distinctness. Why had she displayed such anger, such scorn, at last ?

‘Yes, I *made* my eyes lie to you, on purpose, because I wished to be revenged on you.’

Revenged ? For what ? Because he had laid his homage at her feet ? Ah, bah ! She had been set on by Antje ; they had frightened her among them.

That woman whose horizon was no wider than a tea-cup, what could *she* understand of intellectual relationships, of the force which attracts one soul to another ? Everything about her was coarse and clumsy, her whole manner of thought and feeling. Pots and pans, baby’s pap, her money-boxes—a delightful conglomeration ! Oh, to get away—away from this narrowness !

He went to the window and looked out into the night. The wind had died down ; a light, silvery mist floated about the beeches beyond the clearing where the forest-house stood. He took up the letter and held it close before his eyes, but he could not read the writing ; and after all there was no hurry. “But the telegram—probably the announcement that the shares in the F—— Bank are sold.”

He had given the order to sell because he had

happened to hear that something was wrong with this bank. It was no longer any affair of his, but, after all, it was his duty to see that his wife's fortune was safely invested ; it had dwindled a good deal as it was. If he had not sometimes been lucky in his stock speculations, things might have been even worse. Barrenberg had advised him to buy these confounded shares. His friend, who was usually well up in such matters, had felt sure they would rise in value.

Leo held the telegram still unopened in his hand, and looked at it. He had bought shares at a far higher value nominally than the capital which was at his disposal. Confound it, it would be disgusting if he should have to sell at a much lower rate. If he had only thought to cast a glance at the prices of stocks in the counting-room at the iron-works !

Suddenly a cold shiver passed over him. Then he groped for the match-box and lighted the thin little candle in the shining brass candlestick, put down the telegram, and opened the letter first. It contained a few courteous lines of regret that the Committee of the Exposition in Berlin were unfortunately unable to accept his picture, "The Spanish Dancer," on account of want of room and its too tardy arrival.

A scornful smile passed over the painter's face ; he knew very well what phrases the gentlemen of the jury had at hand when it was a question of rejecting a picture. They called it among themselves, "putting it into its coffin."

"Ha, ha, ha !" Leo was still laughing as he took up the telegram. "What now ?" he said

aloud, as he tore open the envelope, and his eyes were fixed on the few words in blue pencil. They were as follows :

“ Your order received too late. F—— Bank stopped payment. Deficit large. Letter follows.

“ KREISLER.”

The trembling hand dropped the paper ; the flickering flame lighted up a distorted face. Leo took up the glass of water and drank it off to the last drop in long, eager draughts, for his tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth. As he set it down again, he knocked over the candle, which went out, and the glass went crashing on the floor. Then the bedstead creaked, and a dull groan echoed through the little room. It penetrated to the room below. Lola, who slept beside the Frau Försterin's bed, lifted up her head and emitted a low howl, followed by a prolonged growl.

The woman's head rose from the pillow. “ Will you be quiet ? ” scolded the mistress under her breath. Then *she*, too, heard the groans, and she started up in bed.

“ Husband, go see what is the matter upstairs ! ”

“ I heard the noise ; I will go up,” was the reply.

A minute later the Förster was stumbling up the stairs with his big stick, and knocked at the chamber door.

“ Herr Jussnitz, what's the matter ? ”

No answer.

Wend tried to turn the handle, but the door was locked.

“ This isn't a robber's cave,” he grumbled.

“ Herr Jussnitz ! ” he shouted louder.

Steps approached the door, and a voice so hoarse and strange that he felt as if he had never heard it before said from within :

"It is nothing, Wend ; I was only having a bad dream."

"Open the window," advised the forester ; "the air is too close in that little room. Dorchon made up too hot a fire. Good-night."

Then he went downstairs again.

"You are always fancying things," he grumbled ; "it was nothing but a nightmare. Probably the funeral feast was rather heavy."

"And you scold me for that, do you, you cross old bear ?" she said, mockingly ; adding gravely : "You remember his accident when he was here before ? Well, he looked just the same to-night."

"You ought to be a prophetess, or a fortune-teller," he said, with a yawn. "You are too clever by half, Dora." And thereupon he pulled up the coverlet over his head and began to snore.

But his young wife could not sleep. It seemed to her as though something mysterious were going on upstairs ; her heart beat violently, and she lay and stared up at the ceiling as if she could pierce it with her eyes, and she listened to the sounds overhead ; now a chair was being pulled out ; it must have stood in front of the table between the windows ; she could hear it distinctly.

Lola had crept out of her basket and was sniffing up at her mistress. The young wife felt that the dog was listening too, for a nervous shudder passed over her body now and then, and she occasionally uttered a low growl.

"Lola, what is going on up there?" she whispered, and she began to feel frightened, she did not herself know why. Had the nightmare clung to her husband's clothes, and had he brought it down with him? Her limbs seemed weighted with lead, and she was overpowered by a horrible dread.

The cuckoo-clock in the sitting-room struck two. She thought of the day when the man upstairs had met with his "accident;" she and her husband had both had a very shrewd suspicion what sort of an accident it was. The night before, he had crept about in the room upstairs in precisely the same way, and she had lain awake then just as she was doing now, with a strong presentiment that something dreadful was going to happen; and she had not been mistaken.

Lola kept on growling at short intervals. Now the man upstairs would walk up and down, and now he would stand still; she thought she could hear a deep sigh. She tried to clasp her hands in prayer, but she could not. At her head, in the old bedstead in which the forester's mother used to sleep, she could hear a ticking, loud and hurried, like a watch.

"Such nonsense!" she said, scolding herself. "It is a wood-moth; but it must have gone crazy to-night, for I do not hear it usually. It is the death-watch," she thought, with a shudder.

Then the cuckoo sang out again in the next room—half-past two. If the time would only go faster; if morning would only come!

"My God!" she shrieked, suddenly. "God have mercy upon us!"

Upstairs a shot had been fired.

They both sprang out of bed and hurriedly threw on some clothes. Dora was first to reach the stairs and the locked door. She shook the handle in terror, and the dog scratched at the threshold and whined. The forester came up with the axe and broke the thin boards in two.

"Oh, Herr Jussnitz!" wailed Dorchon, as she rushed in and fell on her knees beside the man who lay there on the floor, his body half-supported on one arm, the revolver still in his hand.

"This time I took better aim," he gurgled in his throat and fell back insensible.





CHAPTER XXIV.

It was nearly four o'clock in the morning when Antje was wakened by a loud ringing at the door. Sleep had come at last to her weary eyes, and now she started up out of a bad dream, in which she was standing beside the water, where Leo was struggling in vain to reach the shore ; she stood there with bound hands, and feet chained, powerless to help him. He bound her thus himself ; he *would* not be saved by her.

She sat up, with her heart beating violently. Had she been mistaken ? Did the bell really ring ?

The bell rang again, hurriedly, anxiously, as if there had been an accident. She was dressed in a moment.

Was it fire ?

Shuffling feet ran past along the corridor, down the stairs ; the porter was hurrying to open the door.

Antje, with trembling hands, fastened the belt of her blouse ; there was a knock already. She unbolted the door, and the porter stood before her with a pale, terrified face.

" Madame Jussnitz—ah, my God, dear madame, don't be frightened, there has been another accident—the forester is downstairs—the master, oh, my God—he—— "

Antje stared at the old man as if she did not understand a word. Then she heard the forester's voice.

"Frau Jussnitz," he said, coming into the circle of light that streamed out of Antje's room, "Herr Jussnitz has had an accident like that he had before, and he must have help at once. My wife said you had a doctor in the house—Frau Jussnitz, you must not faint!"

He sprang forward and supported the tottering figure. But Antje had already recovered. "Wake the Herr Doctor," she ordered, shortly, "and have the horses put to the carriage. How long a drive is it, Herr Förster?"

She had thrown the door of her room wide open and was looking for shawls and wraps. The porter hurried away.

"Three-quarters of an hour, if you do not spare the horses, Frau Jussnitz."

"Take additional horses!" she called out to the porter, and then hurried to the room where her child was sleeping. At that moment the door opened, and Hilda stood before her. Antje took the trembling girl by the hand and drew her into the room.

"There sleeps the child," she said in great agitation; "guard it, for I must go to *him*."

"What has happened? For Heaven's sake, dear Frau Jussnitz, tell me what it is!" entreated the terrified girl.

Antje stopped a moment in her hurried movements.

"He has tried to take his life," she said, hoarsely.

Maiberg entered the room just as Hilda with a low cry sank down fainting.

"Hanna," cried the young wife to the house-keeper, who, wakened out of her slumbers by the unusual noise, had just come in, "take care of the young lady ; we have no time, we must go—Maiberg, come !"

And she hurried downstairs. Maiberg called back some instructions and then followed her. The carriage had just come round.

"Do not spare the horses," said Antje to the coachman. Then she got in, followed by Maiberg and the forester, and the carriage dashed off. Maiberg, who sat beside the young wife, felt the trembling and shuddering that shook her frame from time to time. But no word of complaint or of self-reproach, as he had feared, crossed her lips. She put a few questions to the forester, but she spoke with difficulty.

"It is only that he has lost so much blood, Frau Jussnitz ; my poor Dorchén did not know what to do—and this time, you see, this time we couldn't bring him down to your house ; this time it is worse," said the man.

She was silent. They began to climb the steep hill, but they still went rapidly. She leaned out of the carriage window. "We have only reached the toll-house," she murmured.

"So soon?" exclaimed the forester ; "then we shall not be much longer."

Still a little while, and then the panting horses stopped before the low house, from whose windows the red lamp-light shone out into the gray dawn of the April morning. Antje got out and hurried up the steps to the door, followed by the forester.

"Upstairs, Frau Jussnitz, upstairs!" he whispered.

And she climbed up the steep stairs. At every step she leaned heavily on the banisters, as if the boards were swaying beneath her feet, and as if the house were tottering over her head. She had only *one* wish, *one* prayer, that he might still live, if only for a few minutes. "Oh, just God, only long enough for me to ask him why, why he has done this thing to me—only long enough to let me press his hand, only that! Oh, have mercy!"

The forester's wife was standing on the threshold; she moved aside for the pale young wife. "He is unconscious," she whispered, stooping to pick up the fur cloak which had slipped from Antje's shoulders; then she shut the door behind her. She only saw how the wife went up to the bed on which the wounded man was laid, with her hands clasped. Then she stood outside in the little entry, which had for a ceiling the open roof with its rafters. The house was still as death; they were waiting for the doctor, who was making his preparations below. This waiting seemed like an eternity to her, and yet it was scarcely a minute before Maiberg and the forester came up the stairs, bringing with them all that was necessary to bind up the severe wound.

Antje gave her aid during the examination, like an experienced nurse. From time to time she looked at Maiberg as if to read in his face the answer to her mute questionings—death or life?

"Tell me frankly, is it very bad?" she whispered at length, staring at the blood-soaked pillow.

"He came near bleeding to death, and that is the most serious part of it," he replied. "The ball

went through the breast, but it came out at the back, and that is not unfavorable, and, besides, he has an excellent constitution. It is all in God's hand, Frau Antje."

And Antje silently assented. She knew very well that he was nearer death than life. And she helped to place the unconscious man back in the bed after the wound had been bound-up.

"Can he be moved?" she inquired.

"It is not to be thought of," was the reply.

Antje seated herself quietly in the old arm-chair covered with blue and red checked linen at the foot of the bed.

"Order everything you need, Herr Doctor," she said. "There are ice-bags and all that sort of thing at the house, and the carriage can bring them all up."

He offered to watch, but she declined. "That is my office."

She hardly knew when he went away. She looked dreamily about the tiny room; then her eyes fell on a letter which lay on the commode under the flower-vase. She could reach it without leaving her chair.

"To my wife," she read. This bit of paper was folded round a letter and a telegram.

She read by the light of the dying lamp the announcement of the banker, the refusal of the picture, and she dropped the letters and turned toward the unconscious man. "That was why you did it," she said. "Was it for that?"

But he lay there, breathing with difficulty, and could not answer, could not even hear.

“ Oh, if you had only had confidence in me, if you only had ! ” she wailed, and caught at his hand, which lay on the coverlid tightly closed. And then she started back, for between the waxen-white fingers peeped out the end of a red ribbon, and when she had carefully disengaged it, it proved to be a little red bow, a bow that she knew, ah, so well !

“ *That* was why ! ” she said, aloud. “ Ah, yes : I had forgotten that. That was why ! ”





CHAPTER XXV.

MANY anxious days followed, during which the red-haired Frau Dorchen sat watching on the stairs, hushing the dogs into silence and bidding the maids walk softly, for the gentleman upstairs was dying.

"Husband, he will certainly die this evening; he cannot more than live through this day. No one could go through so much," she would whisper to the forester, and the tear-dimmed eyes, which were of the color of reddish-brown velvet, looked shyly up at the window of the sick-room. "You will see, Wilhelm, when you come back from your snipe-shooting, it will be all over. I heard a screech-owl hoot last night, and that has never happened up here before in all my life."

"Dora, you have always slept so soundly."

"Oh, Wilhelm, it is not that. I am sure he is going to die."

"I am almost sure of it, too, Dora."

"His poor wife, Wilhelm! She looks perfectly wretched, and she hasn't slept an hour for a whole fortnight. She will hardly let me take her place by his bedside for a few minutes, even by day."

"Ah, yes—h'm. God gives extra strength to you women, so you do not feel any weariness from that sort of thing. You would have had to put me un-

derground long ago, Dora, if I had gone a fortnight without sleep, and yet she is a delicate woman. But she never utters a complaint or makes any useless moans. You might learn something from her, Dora."

And her husband walked out into the dim spring woods, his dog following at his heels, and his young wife stood on the stone steps before the door and looked after him. "Ah, I only begin to realize how I love you when I think of that poor man upstairs," she murmured, and vowed to herself by all she held sacred never to vex Wilhelm again; and then she blushed, for he never was vexed except when she chattered too much and coquetted with the artists who haunted the little forest-house. She cast a glance up at the gable windows, which stood wide open to let in the air, which was soft and moist and spring-like, as one seldom finds it in the mountains at that season of the year.

It was the nineteenth of April; the beeches were growing feathery, and the buds might burst open any day now. It was already green in the valleys, the manor-house of "Gottessegen" was already surrounded by the light emerald green of spring, and the violets were blooming along the garden wall in great masses. The doctor had said so yesterday. He had been down at the house and had brought up a great bunch of them for Frau Antje, and the whole room smelt like a bank of violets.

The Frau Försterin glanced up again. There stood Antje by the window, pale and exhausted, looking out into the fragrant world outside with sad eyes.

"Frau Jussnitz, Frau Jussnitz, it is such a lovely evening. Do go and take a little walk, and I will take your place upstairs," cried Dorchen, in a whisper.

But Antje shook her head and turned back into the room.

"She will kill herself, I am sure," said Frau Dorchen. "But, good Heavens, what will you have? He is her husband."

And then she seated herself on the threshold and began to knit on a huge greenish-gray stocking for Wilhelm.

Upstairs, Antje was sitting in her arm-chair again. The sick man was sleeping for the first time a quiet sleep, without the constant moans and the panting breath that had hitherto disturbed him. Antje had wiped his damp forehead, and her hands now lay lightly clasped in her lap; her eyes were shut, an intolerable weariness had overpowered her. She started up once or twice, and then her weary eyes closed again and her head fell over against the back of the chair, and she slept. Everything was silent as death; only the cry of a starling flying to her nest broke the profound stillness. The twilight was just tinged with a faint rosy gleam, which had a wonderful effect in beautifying the poor little room.

The sick man stirred; he opened his eyes and closed them again, till at length he opened them wide, looking about him with the first gleam of recovered consciousness. He gazed around the room in surprise, but presently the slightly raised head sank back upon the pillows with a low moan. Still his eyes remained fixed upon the figure in the arm-chair. She was still sound asleep. He gazed at her as if

to impress upon his mind that it was really this slender, dark figure that had been watching him, nursing him, and caring for him during these last miserable days.

Antje? Was it really she? No; the Antje whom he knew was a beautiful, blooming woman, and this face leaning against the cushion had grown years older through grief and anxiety, and the firmly compressed lips wore an expression of pain, and the reddened eyes looked as if they had shed an abundance of tears.

The remembrance of everything suddenly returned, and with it anger and anguish inexpressible—that he should be alive. Why did people rush in to rob death of his prey, to bring him back to a hated existence by all the appliances of science? Good God! who gives them the right to force an unhappy man to prolong his existence? He could not, he must not live!

He made a movement with his left hand, and a slight cry of pain escaped him.

She started up out of her slumber, and the next moment she was bending over him. He could feel her anxious look through his closed lids; he could feel her soft, cool fingers laid gently on his forehead, to discover whether the horrible fever was still torturing him.

He lay quiet again, as if sleeping; he had not the courage to open his eyes.

She left him and went to the window. "Frau Dora," he heard her say, softly, "do you know when the doctor is coming back? I quite forgot to ask to-day."

"He will be sure to be punctual ; it would be the first time that he failed if he does not, Frau Jussnitz. It still wants eight minutes to seven—and there he is now !" she exclaimed.

"Thank God !" murmured Antje.

This exclamation seemed to the sick man like a sharp iron turned suddenly in his wound. He felt the blood mounting to his head ; the old angry feeling seized upon him, as it had always done when Maiberg hovered about Antje. He groaned again, and as he heard the greeting between the Frau Försterin and his friend, and saw Antje creep out of the room on tip-toe to meet him, he gazed at her with black looks on her return.

But the doctor perceived at once that his consciousness had returned ; he came up to the bed and said, in a loud, hearty tone : "Well, thank God, Leo, we have got you back again. It is high time, I must say, old fellow !"

Antje was standing at the foot of the bed. She stood there as if carved out of stone, her head slightly thrown back, with a sad, weary expression in her face.

"Do you want anything just now, Leo ?" she inquired, in a low tone.

"No," he replied.

"I shall be downstairs, in the sitting-room, in case you want me," she said, and left the room.

"Maiberg, is *that* all your science can do, to prolong for a little the life that a man would gladly fling away ?" cried Leo, with a great effort.

"A little ? I hope for a long time—if you will be reasonable, my friend."

"I *can* not live under these circumstances."

"What circumstances?"

"Good Heavens! you know very well——"

"That is to say, Leo, you cannot live without your *wife*."

The sick man's face flushed crimson. "Don't treat me as if I were a silly boy. She has complained to you, no doubt, why I—took to the revolver——"

"Upon my honor, Leo, I do not understand one word you are saying."

"Antje has told you nothing?"

"No."

Leo shut his eyes and lay still. "Then you must have found out some other way that I——"

"I know literally *nothing*. I have only had my suspicions. But—you must not agitate yourself."

"What did you suspect?" inquired Leo, faintly.

"Tell me, I beg of you."

"Your foolish passion for Hilda——"

He was interrupted by a low, scornful laugh.

"Was it not so, Leo? Tell me the truth—or, rather, say nothing about it, for it is no longer of importance."

"A man does not put an end to his life for the sake of a woman's whim—at least, not a man like *me*," replied the sick man. "There must be worse things than that to bear; one must first see all one's hopes utterly destroyed before—but you can get Antje to tell you."

"If she *wished* to confide in me, she would have done it long ago. I will give you a piece of good advice—go to sleep."

"Rather give me your promise to set me on my feet again ; to make me tolerably strong, so I can chop wood or do something of that sort. Every one does not make a good beggar, and there is no hope of anything better."

"You will be quite well again, if you are only reasonable."

"Please tell my wife that she need not trouble herself about me any more ; she must be neglecting more important duties."

"You foolish fellow, are you still as blind as ever with regard to your wife?" Maiberg wanted to say, but he restrained himself, for Leo was still very ill. He only shrugged his shoulders and went to the window ; he was vexed already with himself for having spoken more vehemently than was prudent.

Below, the superintendent of the works was walking up and down with Antje, in earnest conversation. The old man came up conscientiously every other day, to make his report with regard to the business. They usually sat, on such occasions, at the oilcloth-covered table in the parlor, with the forester's leaden ink-stand between them, and "managed the business," as the old man called it.

To-day they were settling their affairs as they walked up and down. The superintendent seemed very eager ; he would stop short every little while, and accompanied his words with lively gestures. Antje listened with bent head, and when she spoke it was only to utter a few words.

Maiberg turned round. "Go to sleep," he said

to Leo again, "and don't worry. I have something to do downstairs."

His patient said nothing, but he smiled bitterly. Then he could hear his friend's voice outside, and a loud cry uttered by Dora—it sounded like a cry of joy. A moment later she tripped into the room.

"Oh, I only wanted to say how glad I am that you have recovered your consciousness," she whispered. "Good gracious, it would have been horrid if you had died now, just now, when everything is so green and life is so pleasant. Herr Jussnitz, how could you? Good Heavens, if you could have seen your wife's misery, your heart would have ached for her! She did not weep or wail, to be sure, but she clasped her hands when she came up to your bed and saw you lying there looking so dreadful, and she looked like the Virgin in the Oberrode church, before the cross—exactly like that, and she has been on her feet day and night. But you see, people can only do that sort of thing out of real, true love, Herr Jussnitz!"

"Be silent!" he cried harshly, interrupting the poor woman's chatter.

She stared at him in startled amazement, remained standing for a few moments, and then crept softly out of the room. "He is very far from well yet," she thought to herself, as she descended the stairs.

And the sick man was left alone. The darkness came on gradually, and the cool breeze from the forest fanned his burning forehead. A dog's bark occasionally broke the stillness, or the rattling of a

chain which fastened the cow in the stall, but otherwise the house seemed deserted.

They were probably sitting in the parlor talking together, or Antje had walked a little way with Maiberg in the pleasant spring evening. He could see them in his mind's eye ; they were walking close together, the two figures, without speaking—for what need had they for words ? There was nothing to say now—nor would there be for long—for he still lived. And suddenly he was seized with a fierce desire to see what his wife was doing now, his wife who could suffer like our Lady of Sorrows, and—yet carried herself as proudly as a queen.

What did she want of him now ? Why did she not leave the wretch where he had fallen ? He *would* not have her compassion, he would not endure her generosity ; he hated her at this moment as he had formerly done, when he had called her his chain.

Hark ! did not the stairs creak ? Some one came softly in at the door. It was *she*. In one hand she carried a night-lamp, carefully shading it with the other so the light would not shine in his eyes. She went up to the bureau, placed the lamp so that he could not see the light ; then she crossed the room and bent down over him, believing him to be asleep. She stood so for a moment, then she shut the window, all but one little pane, and finally seated herself by the dim light on the bureau, took out a note-book, and began to write.

He could observe her closely, and he did so with a longing he had never felt before, to discover something in her manner at which he could take

offence, that would give him the right to get rid of her. Now and then she looked up and passed her hand across her forehead, and her eyes had an anxious, frightened look, and then she went on with her accounts. Once or twice she gave a deep sigh; at length she laid aside her pencil, and carefully and noiselessly drew out the straw mattress from behind the little stove, spread it out beside his bed, took some blankets and pillows from a chair, and prepared to hold her night-watch.

After a while he drew himself up and looked down at her; her weariness had overpowered her, and she was apparently sleeping soundly and quietly. He could not sleep, but kept looking at her again and again till the gray dawn. At last he, too, was overcome by weariness and slept.

When he awoke the sun was shining into the room, and the dancing shadows of budding branches were playing on the ceiling and the floor of the room, and also on the vacant space where Antje had slept.

He caught at the strong rope, with a hare's foot for a handle, which served as a bell-rope, and pulled it violently.

"Halloo!" cried the doctor in the door-way, "that sounds energetic! What will you have? Your breakfast? Frau Dora will bring it immediately."

He wanted to ask for Antje, but he could not bring himself to do so. He only looked about the room as if he missed something.

"She was up and away early this morning," said the young forester's wife, who had just come in and quickly divined what he wanted. "It is high time

she was looking after her child and her house. Heaven knows she doesn't have a very easy time of it if she is rich."

He bit his lip; had she gone because she knew that he no longer needed her?

They were strange days which followed, days divided between anger with her for leaving him, and self-reproach, and longing to see her. He listened with all his ears for the rolling of wheels, for the snapping of a whip, in the direction of the woodland road; he started when the old stairs creaked under a light footstep, and turned pale when he saw that it was only Frau Dorchon. He derided himself for it, and when in the evening the twilight came on, and Maiberg put down the book which he had been reading aloud, and left him to get a little fresh air, when it was so still all about him that he could hear the gnawing of the wood-moths in the old beams, and the clatter of a mouse under the boards, then he put his hand over his eyes and set his teeth hard, and something that he had not felt since he was a boy trickled down from his burning eyes over his cheeks. But then he angrily brushed away the tears and called himself a sick, sentimental fool; and when the doctor came back and began to chat pleasantly, he returned only rough and biting answers. He never inquired for Antje.

And she did not come back.

The days wore away; Leo's youthful vigor slowly gained the mastery. He was soon able to sit out-of-doors, or to walk a little way into the forest, leaning on Maiberg's arm.

"This air seems just made for you, Leo," said his friend; "and these are delightful days that we are idling away like this. Heaven knows whether we shall have such pleasant ones again—quiet, peace, the freshness of the woods. I am enjoying myself as I have not done for a long time."

The doctor snatched off his hat as he spoke, and looked through the bower of beeches in their spring green, and his usually rather grave face wore an expression of quiet happiness.

"I think you are going to have some visitors, Leo," he exclaimed, as he turned round. "Look, look, there are the brown horses from the iron-works, and that little white cloud sitting in the carriage is your little daughter, accompanied by the very worthy Frau Classen."

And so it proved. A dainty little girl came tripping toward the two gentlemen, holding the hand of the old woman, who had decked herself in holiday attire, in her native Dutch cap, with the great earrings.

The child carried a great bunch of flowers in her tiny hand. She held it out to her father, saying: "Here, papa!" and the rosy, childish face, like a fresh little rosebud itself, peeped out from under the little hat.

Maiberg set up the camp-chair for Leo under a great beech-tree, and strolled on. He could see Leo still thoughtfully holding the child's hand in his, while Classen seated herself on the grass and brought out her knitting-work.

"It is very fine weather," said the old woman at length, breaking the silence, "and it is so splendid

up here in the woods, and I am glad enough to be home again among the mountains."

He nodded absently.

"The air wasn't healthy in that old Sibyllenburg, sir; it didn't agree with any of us," she continued, beginning a new needle. "Leonie, there is a pine-cone; run and get it! We have to play with her a little, sir," she reminded him; "she is used to it with Fräulein Hilda."

"Ah, yes! Is the Fräulein still there?"

"Yes, she is still staying with us, sir, and it doesn't look now as though she was likely to go."

"When did you come from Sibyllenburg?" he inquired, looking after the child, who was dancing about on the grass-grown path.

"Oh, a few days ago, just after it was sold."

He started up. "Sold?" But what business was it of his?

"The gracious lady was there herself with the judge, and picked out all the things which were to be kept. Oh, my senses! She looked just like a ghost when she signed the papers, though I couldn't help feeling glad, for it was an unlucky sort of a place, that old house."

"Who bought it?" was on the tip of his tongue, but he could not bring himself to say it. It was all the same to him; he no longer owned a single stone of it.

At this moment Claassen spied the Frau Försterin, who was beckoning to her from the house, and she charged the little one to be good. At any rate there was a good cup of coffee in store for her.

The pale man and the rosy child were left alone

together ; the child had come back to him and sat playing quietly at his feet, smiling up at him now and then with a pair of clear, wonderfully deep greenish eyes. He watched her as he would a flower which had blossomed in a night, with amazement and admiration. He hardly knew his child, and perceived now for the first time how wonderfully pretty she was.

At length she stood up. "Come with me to mamma," she said, taking him coaxingly by the hand.

He flushed beneath the eyes of this little creature.

"To mamma !" she repeated, and puckered up her mouth to cry. And as he still remained seated without moving, she began to cry in good earnest, and this note of alarm brought Classen and the forester's wife running up at the same moment.

"Oh, you naughty child !" scolded the Frau Försterin, carrying the sobbing little one away to show her the "mooly cow," but Classen stayed behind.

"Little impetuous thing !" she said ; "but she gets that from you, sir."

And then she began to enumerate some of her characteristics in which she resembled her father, and wound up by saying : "But we don't give in to her ; she has to mind."



CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN the little one drove away with the old woman, quite comforted again, Leo went back into the house and seated himself, as he used often to do, by the window of Frau Dora's exquisitely neat parlor. But here he was even less able to concentrate his thoughts, for the young Försterin thought it her duty to entertain the gloomy man, and she had a whole budget of news from the iron-works. Frau Jussnitz had laid the corner-stone for the new schoolhouse yesterday, and the little one had to give the first stroke with the hammer. And then she and Herr Ferdinand Frey together had bought the "Gunderode" iron-works, and they were building a furnace in common. Who would ever have thought it of the quiet, pale woman! Herr Kortmer said the old lady had been capable enough, but *this* one went far ahead of her, for the late Frau Bergrath was a little afraid of new enterprises.

"I am sure you will be surprised," she concluded, "when you go down again. And when are you going back? Heaven forbid that I should wish you to go, but I am sure you must find it frightfully dull here. To-morrow morning the Herr Doctor is going fox-hunting with Wilhelm. Then you will be left alone here again. But what do you say? Up-

stairs in the attic are all your old painting-things—even the umbrella is there. You ought to paint, Herr Jussnitz, you ought to paint ! ”

And the agile little woman hurried away to look for the things, to the great relief of the man she left behind. He stood up, and walked up and down the room till, lost in thought, he stopped at length before the Frau Försterin's glass cupboard, in which stood out against a bright blue background brilliant cups, cake-plates, her bridal wreath, wax angels, flower-vases, and a variety of things of a similar nature. His eyes rested absently on these splendors, until they were caught by a little object at which he looked long and thoughtfully. It was a woman's head modelled in clay, representing in a life-like manner the saucy nose, the full lips, and the wavy masses of hair of the young Försterin—a portrait bust which could not have been better.

He was still looking at it when Frau Dorchen came back.

“ It is all arranged in your room upstairs, Herr Jussnitz, as if you had only just left it,” she cried gayly. But he did not even say, “ Thank you.” He pointed to the little bust and said : “ It has kept pretty well, that little thing.”

She had come nearer, and she laughed. “ Yes ; did you think I was going to throw that beautiful piece of work out of the window, as you wanted me to do, Herr Jussnitz ? Heaven forbid ! Lots of people have admired it and said it looked exactly like me. I shall save this up for my old age, to let people see that I was once young and pretty. And ”—she stopped suddenly and looked at the

painter, who could not take his eyes off the little clay head.

"Herr Jussnitz," she burst out at length, as if a bright idea had just struck her—"Herr Jussnitz, there is plenty of clay out there still. Wouldn't you like—ah, don't be angry; I know it is very impertinent of me—but if you would make me my old man as a companion-piece!" And as he did not answer, she entreated: "Dear Herr Jussnitz, do, and make it as fine and as like as you have made mine. Please, Herr Jussnitz!"

He shook his head and looked at her; but when he saw the entreaty in the eyes of the handsome little woman, a fleeting smile passed over his face.

"Oh, well, if you like," he said in a low voice.

And Frau Dora ran off to prepare the clay, as if he were going to begin that very instant.

He went upstairs to his room, sat down by the window, and watched the moon rise over the trees. Maiberg did not come in until late, and found him still sitting there.

"Have you been to the iron-works?" inquired Leo.

"Yes," replied Maiberg, drawing up a chair.

"I believe I can't stand it here any longer," continued Jussnitz. "Tell me, when shall I be well enough to—to——"

"Soon," was the laconic reply.

Jussnitz got up suddenly; he felt as if he should stifle in this close little room.

"Maiberg!" He stopped in front of the doctor, who was looking out into the moonlight with deep, thoughtful eyes.

"What is it, Leo?"

The painter's arms hung down loosely by his side; he leaned against the table and dropped his eyes. "Even if I wished it, I cannot undertake anything now—without any money," he said.

"You have a claim on part of Antje's property; the judge was explaining it to me the other day," said Maiberg.

Leo stood before his friend with clenched fists.

"Wolf, do you suppose I would take a penny of it?"

"I would not," was the reply. "I should rather borrow something."

Leo laughed aloud. "I don't know a soul in the world who would be willing to risk lending it to me."

"Not one?"

"Not one!"

"H'm! I know of one, Leo. It is not very much, to be sure, but if a few thousand marks would be enough for you to begin on——"

"You?" His voice was full of scorn. "Does your happiness make you so extravagant?"

"Perhaps so, Leo. I beg of you to take the few poor notes; I do not need them at present, and they will be useful to you. I have so much even that I could manage very comfortably to make a little pleasure tour with you."

"You would go away with me—away from here?"

"Certainly."

"But I am not going on a pleasure trip."

"All right! But *take* the money!"

"I thank you, Wolf. Yes, there is nothing else I can do—hard as it is for me."

"Why should it be hard?"

Leo made no reply. He was standing in the shadow, looking at the smiling face of his friend, which was lighted up by a curious, soft radiance as his clear, shrewd eyes gazed out with an unusual expression of longing across at the road which lost itself among the dark pine-trees, by which he drove down the valley every day to the iron-works. And Leo felt his blood boil in his veins; he could not look any longer at his friend in his happy security with this expression of longing on his radiant face.

"Please leave me now, Wolf," he said, rather hoarsely. "I am tired to death."

The doctor rose at once.

"Good-night, Leo. And do not trouble yourself about paying me back. I can wait."

Jussnitz made no reply. He shut the window with a crash, pulled down the curtain, and threw himself, dressed as he was, on the bed. But he could see nothing before him but that moonlit path which led down to the Paradise he had lost. And he had to cling tight to the bedstead to enable him to withstand the force which seemed to be dragging him toward that path.



CHAPTER XXVII.

Down in the valley, in the great house, the young wife was busy from morning till night. She gave her whole attention to the thing she had to do, as if she had no thought for anything else till that was accomplished. She never countermanded an order, nor was the slightest vacillation to be observed in her resolution. She gave her decision in business matters clearly and decidedly, and she was equally clear and decided in her housekeeping and in regard to the training of her child. She never spoke of her husband. It might have been supposed that she had long since forgotten the man whose name she bore, or—had never loved him. The kind friends and neighbors who had heard of the tragedy in the little forest-house, and who came to the manor-house on the pretext of inquiring for Frau Antje, went home again with their curiosity still unsatisfied. Frau Antje received them with perfect friendliness, offered them excellent coffee and cakes; brought her little one in to see the ladies, talked with the gentlemen about the new machinery and the furnace she was having built, and to all their inquiries for Herr Jussnitz's health replied pleasantly: "Oh, thank you, he is very well," in a way that cut short any further researches into the matter. No one

knew of the loss of her fortune except Herr Kortmer, and he took it as much to heart as if it concerned his own property.

Antje kept an impenetrable face as she divulged this disaster to him.

"If painters and that sort of people would only let business alone!" bewailed the old gentleman.

"Frau Antje, how shall we ever make it up?"

"Oh, we will be economical, we will be economical!" she said, comfortingly, smiling with pale lips.

"And we will sell Sibyllenburg—a great part of the money is in Sibyllenburg, Herr Kortmer."

"Ah, who will ever give a penny for such rubbish as china and old brocade, Frau Jussnitz?" burst out the old man. "It is all imitation, no doubt. Who knows how often he was cheated when he bought the things?"

"Kortmer," she said, gravely, "I have no doubt that you are better informed in business matters than Herr Jussnitz, but in artistic matters he knows more than you."

This stopped the little man's complaints. He said no more, but did all he could to arrange their affairs. Sibyllenburg was sold, and after all the debts were paid, there was a small amount left. Antje silently set this aside, in case she should yet receive the hardest blow of all—Leo's request for money. She blushed with shame at the thought. She suffered tortures as she brooded over his possible future. She could not offer him aid in the form of money under the present circumstances; it would be a blow to his sense of honor, it would be almsgiving, like charity to a beggar. But did he still

possess strength enough to rouse himself bodily and mentally, and make his own way? But if he were still capable of saving himself, of retrieving the past, she must not venture to show herself otherwise than hard, hard as a rock.

She must let things take their course, and stand quietly by to see if he were capable of extricating himself from the difficulties into which he had plunged. No one knew what a tumult raged within her. Nothing seemed to allay it but the remembrance of that little bow which his hand had clutched in what he thought was his dying moment; but then she was even more wretched than before.

Maiberg never talked to her about Leo, when he came down from the forest-house to drink his coffee with Frau Antje in the garden hall. He only said at such times: "He progresses every day," and that was enough for her.

These were curious afternoons that they spent in the large, comfortable room that Antje had fitted up according to her own taste. There was not a trace of æstheticism, and yet how really comfortable and elegant it was in spite of the mixture of styles! From the dark panelled ceiling hung an antique brass chandelier, which had probably lighted up the banquets of the former owner many and many a time. Before the little leaded window-panes hung gayly embroidered curtains drawn widely apart to let in the bright sunshine. The shining waxed floor was partly covered by a bright-colored carpet, and Antje's spinning-wheel stood by the fireplace before a pretty peasant chair. Beautiful old cabinets were placed against the wainscoted walls

—one genuine rococo, inlaid with ivory ; another Renaissance in style, on which was the Marriage at Cana in wood-mosaic, an artistic piece of work. The work-table, by the southern window, had come from the Dutch grandmother. The great, comfortable sofa, the round table in front of it, and the army of chairs and stools of different centuries, looked cosy and attractive. For the decoration of the walls and cornices, Antje had plundered the attics, had filled old Delft jars with fresh flowers, had brought out old family pictures in black frames, which made an admirable decoration for the old brown leather hangings adorned with arabesques stamped in gold, such as would put modern imitations to shame for color and effectiveness. And here, before the door opening on the veranda, through which streamed the golden-green light from the garden, they sat in the afternoons when the young doctor came—Antje alone or with Hilda.

Hilda was still there. While Antje had been nursing Leo she had devoted herself to the care of the child. And now, when old Classen had taken charge of her, Antje could not say to the young girl, without a want of courtesy of which she was not capable : “ Leave my house ! ” And Hilda did not seem to think for a moment that such a thing was possible.

Antje endured the girl's presence with a hauteur which could not have failed to be painful to Hilda if she had ever wakened out of a certain dreamy meditation into which she seemed to have plunged. Antje looked at her sometimes with a feeling of amazement. She would smile so happily to herself,

and then again an expression of pain would draw down the little mouth and a frown would appear between the dark brows. At such moments Antje supposed she was thinking of her future happiness, or she was anxious about his future and her own.

Sometimes Hilda would wander about the woods for the whole afternoon, and would not come back till evening, when she would appear with glowing cheeks, a half-withered bunch of flowers at her breast, and both hands full of blossoms, which she would lay silently on Antje's work-table. The young wife would put the flowers in fresh water, but she carried them into another room where she could not see them. She always felt as if she must ask the flowers: "Was she *alone* when she gathered you, or did *he* help to pluck you?"

The doctor, apparently, did not observe this rather strained intercourse between the two, and he had adopted a fatherly tone toward Hilda, half-tender, half-reproving, but more inclined to reproof than to praise.

The two ladies were sitting together thus in the garden hall on the last of May, Hilda with a book in her hand from which she was reading aloud. Antje had requested it, in order to escape the torture of a conversation with her, for she felt that Hilda was seeking for an opportunity to talk with her to-day, and she *would* not give it to her. What good could it do? The little one was playing on the sunny gravel walk in front of the veranda, under Classen's care. Antje was holding her work idly in her lap, and did not hear a word of what Hilda was

reading. It was "L' Arrabbiata," by Paul Heyse. The young girl stopped for a moment. Antje, thus startled out of her meditations, looked inquiringly at her, and Hilda went on reading :

"As for my father, no one ever knew how he treated my mother, for she would have died a thousand deaths before she would have uttered a word of complaint ! And just because she loved him. Now, if that is the effect of love, that it closes one's mouth when one ought to shriek for help, and makes a person utterly helpless against tortures worse than the bitterest enemy would inflict, then I will never give my heart into the power of a man."

She dropped the book, and looked at Antje timidly, and with a shy, imploring glance. The young wife hastily took up her work, and then she put it aside, got up, and, opening her parasol of unbleached linen, she went out through the sunny garden along the path by the river. There she opened a little door in the wall which led into the wood, and began to walk slowly up the steep path which wound along the mountain, with its magnificent beeches. Such a woodland path is delicious in the spring-time. She walked on under a light green, transparent canopy, through which fell bright golden rays, and on either side soft moss, young ferns, and blue flowers. And everywhere the tiny brooks, clear as crystal, plashed and tinkled and babbled across the path in their hurry to get down into the valley. Now and then a deer would withdraw into the thicket slowly, as if it knew that in this blissful spring-time no hunter was lying in wait for it. Its little fawn looked wonderingly at the human figure, and then ran off after its mother.

The songs of birds sounded from the tree-tops ; it was so quiet, and yet so sweet here in the forest, so peaceful and yet so full of longing ; it was like a sermon on the joys of eternal youth and bliss, like a song of love and happiness.

Antje felt all this ; she took it all in, but it hurt her. She was possessed by but one thought—what will he do ? How will it end ? How could she help him without humiliating him ? She felt weary in body to-day, and discouraged, in addition. She wondered how she could ever bear to live on like this, and the worst was yet to come. But nothing but her pale cheeks and her sad eyes betrayed how much she was suffering.

What was it Hilda had just read ? “ Love closes the mouth when one ought to cry out for help ! ” But, ah, who was there to help her ? She knew no one in the whole wide world ; the only friend she had was dead now.

She had slowly mounted higher and higher. Now she turned aside from the road and walked along a narrow path through the young undergrowth ; the bushes swung together behind her, and like a green transparent curtain separated her from the road which she had just left. She knew well and loved the little open space in which she now stood. A couple of tree-stumps had been made into a rude seat, by the aid of a couple of boards, beneath a huge overhanging beech-tree. Through an opening in the trees one could look down from here on the manor-house and the garden. Although she was far above them, Antje could plainly distinguish the white figure of her little daughter, who was

playing with her tiny garden-tools beside the nurse, who was busily knitting.

How delightful it would have been if husband and wife could have been sitting here, looking down on their happy home !

She leaned her head against the trunk of the tree. She would gladly have wept, have wept all this wretched weight from her heart, but she seemed to have no more tears. She sat thus for a long time, till a light step sounded on the path ; through the bushes she caught the gleam of a light dress, and the next moment Antje saw, a little above her, Hilda walking along, swinging her garden hat in her hand. Then she stopped, and Antje heard a familiar voice saying, in a tone of good-humored reproof :

"Now unpunctual you are, Hilda ! You will have to break yourself of that !"

Then followed a kiss, and Maiberg—yes, it was Maiberg—added : "I am always the instructor, my poor little girl, and never the tender lover ! How will you bear that, Hilda ?"

The girl was silent for a while, and then she said clearly and heartily : "I am so thankful that I have *you* ! I could not imagine myself engaged to any one else but you, Wolf."

Antje's eyes had opened wider and wider, and every trace of color had fled from her face. She walked on with tottering steps, on and on into the green wilderness, and when she had at length got beyond the sound of those two voices, she stopped, flung her arms round a birch-tree as if for support, and gazed absently along the high-road, which she

had come upon without being aware of it. How was it possible, how could it be possible !

A couple of wood-choppers who were coming along the road took off their hats to her—but she did not see them. After a while she roused herself ; she stepped out into the road, and then walked hurriedly along in the direction of the forest-house. She must keep Leo from hearing this news ; he must not have this last and most bitter cup to drink while he was still so ill, before he had begun to recover his strength. It would crush him to the earth, it would be his ruin. Good God !

She would await Maiberg's return in Frau Dora's parlor, would entreat him to be silent until Leo was quite well again.

By walking quickly she was able to reach the forest-house in three-quarters of an hour. The gnarled oaks in front of it had unfolded all their leaves beneath the rays of the hot sun, and the Försterin had hung her washing out to dry. Leo's gable window stood wide open, and his gay cover-lids and the carpets that Antje had sent up for him were hanging out of the window to air. The dogs were stretched out on the stone steps before the door in the warm sunshine, and on the threshold of the house sat Frau Dorchen, with her red-haired Lola in her lap, talking to the animal in tender, compassionate tones.

Antje bade her " Good afternoon." The little woman looked up ; her eyes were red with crying. " Good Lord ! " she cried, without getting up, " you look like a ghost, Frau Jussnitz ! If you had only come a little earlier ! Herr Jussnitz went down into

the valley only half an hour ago. Good Heavens, I felt as if one of my own relations was going away, we have had him here so long."

"He is gone?" inquired the young wife, her face turning a shade paler.

Dorchen nodded. But Antje walked past the pretty woman, who was washing Lola's wounds, received in the last fox-hunt, with tea, and mounted the stairs to the sick-room; she could not conceal her anxiety from the eyes of this woman.

The room bore traces of the recent departure of its occupant; it looked bare, empty, and forlorn, the bureau drawers left open, a sheet of paper lying on the floor, withered flowers in the vases, and a half-empty wine-glass.

She sat down, quite exhausted, by the bed, and looked about at the disorder, as if she could discover in this miserable rubbish what had driven him away. But she knew already—it was Hilda's infidelity, Hilda's falsehood!

"O God! grant that he may not be driven to despair; support him for his child's sake!" she prayed. She was overpowered by a perfect agony of dread. She started up and hurried to the door, but she stopped, for some one was coming up the stairs, and then toward the room where she was. It was Maiberg, who started back in amazement when he saw Antje.

"You here? And where is Leo?"

"He is gone! I wanted to ask you why he decided so suddenly—" she stammered.

The doctor looked as dismayed as if some one had told him the Brocken had suddenly been re-

moved to China. "He has kept his own counsel," he said at length.

She looked at him wonderingly.

"Why, Frau Antje, what do you suppose?" began Maiberg. "He has gone out into the world! You couldn't expect that he would go on living here like a bird in a cage, having his little dishes filled with food for him every day? He has gone to carve out a career for himself. But I did not know he was in such a hurry about it; I believe he went secretly because he didn't want to take me with him."

"Then you knew that he had a plan?" she inquired.

"Yes, to be sure! I meant even to accompany him a little way on his road—at least, that was my intention yesterday noon; but since then, to be sure, my life has undergone a change."

He leaned against the bureau, and a quiet smile played about his bearded lips.

"Did Leo know of this change?" she inquired, still unable to control her agitation.

The young doctor laughed lightly. "How could he know it? I only knew myself last evening—that I—" He caught the trembling woman's hands and pressed them warmly. "I may say to you, as I was just going to say to Leo, that I am engaged to Hilda," and still continuing to shake her hands, he went on: "Frau Antje, I know you will be surprised; I wonder at it myself. She does not possess one quality of all those I had hoped for and dreamed of in my future wife. I had only one ideal in my mind—a woman like yourself, Frau

Antje, gentle and good as an angel, wise and reasonable—" He laughed, and there was a glimmer of tears in his frank blue eyes. "And now Fate has put in my way a child with all sorts of wrong and silly ideas in her head ; a creature that I must watch over as if I were her father ; a girl who can, perhaps, never give me, of all that a man expects from his future wife, more than a feeling of deep gratitude and a childlike trust and faith ; and yet whom I have loved ever since she first looked at me with her great, splendid eyes, helplessly and imploringly, better, perhaps, than I should have loved a better woman. And now do not say, Frau Antje, that I am on the point of committing a folly ; do not say it ! I know what I am doing, and you, Antje, you, have shown me what true, faithful love really is ! It struggles, it suffers, it is tortured, it can be stern and hard, but it is unalterable in its fidelity."

He released her, and moved away.

She stood where he left her, with bent head. "And Leo ? When he hears it ?" she whispered.

"Frau Antje," he said, putting his hand on her shoulder, "Leo has forgotten that dream of his. I *know* it ; I am not unskilled in reading character. And you will not visit it upon him because he has erred once. And if he had not forgotten, if he had still to *learn* to forget, you must not make it harder for him by a false pity."

She made no reply ; she walked suddenly up to the table, stooped and picked up a little red bow from the floor, which lay dusty and crushed among the rubbish and torn papers. She looked at it for

a little while. "Has he the lesson still to learn?" she asked of the tiny thing. "No!" replied the mute little messenger; "No!"

In the evening of that same day Antje sat at the table at home with the newly engaged couple, wishing them all happiness with a grave but friendly face. And when they separated at length, Hilda caressingly accompanied the young wife to her room, and there she knelt down before her and sobbed out an entreaty for forgiveness.

Antje stroked the young girl's head. "See that you make him happy," was her only reply.

"I will; I will with all my heart," asseverated Hilda.

"Hilda," asked Antje suddenly, in a trembling voice, "do you love him?"

The girl lifted up her tear-stained face; a roguish smile displayed all her little pearly teeth. "I think I do!" she replied in a whisper; "and if I do not love him yet as passionately and as devotedly as I have always fancied I could love, I am sure I shall learn to do so some day."

Antje bent her head sadly. "I trust you may not find yourself mistaken in this belief, dear Hilda. But now, good-night, good-night." And Hilda slipped out of the room.

But Antje did not go to sleep. She walked up and down on this last night in May, in her comfortable, cosey room. And her thoughts strayed away into the wide world—somewhere, somewhere out there, a little boat was tossing on the waves of life; would the weak hand that steered it be strong enough to guide it past the breakers? Had it bal-

last enough of force and character? Would it ever return to her?

A nightingale began to sing outside, in front of the window; the night was so soft, so sweet, so odorous! She went to the window, and looked out into the twilight garden; she stood there as she had done when she was a betrothed maiden, and wished that she might look out to that distant spot whither he had betaken himself.

She thought that a mother who is sending out a beloved son into all the dangers of the world would feel, perhaps, as she did now; that she could not sleep during the night for anxiety; that no morning would dawn in which she would not think of him with fear and dread.

"Thank God!" she said, "that I have work to do—a great deal of work."





CHAPTER XXVIII.

SUMMER passed away, and autumn came round again. The Wild Huntsman dashed through the air in the frightfully stormy nights, the rusty weathercock creaked on its hinges, and the sparks from the forge were scattered in all directions. But the old walls of the manor-house guarded well the lonely woman and her child, who had taken refuge there. The fire blazed in the huge green porcelain stove through all the fury of the tempest. The night-lamp hummed slightly, and the child, in its little bed, breathed softly.

But the larger bed remained untouched ; Frau Antje could not sleep. She thought of her wedding-day the year before, when he made her feel, for the first time, that she was an unloved wife, of no value in his life ; and she recalled all the sad, weary days that had followed. But these late months had seemed the hardest of all. At first, when she found Leo had gone away, she had hoped for a few lines of farewell ; but no news had come, then or later—she had never once heard from him. Maiberg went away, but he, too, knew nothing of Leo.

Hilda had already left "Gottessegen," and returned to her parents. Her lover had followed her, and the wedding had just taken place, only a few days before. The steamer which was carrying them

to Rio de Janeiro was already tossing about on the ocean. Aunt Polly had been present at the wedding, which was made the occasion of a complete reconciliation. A postal-card, which Hilda had scribbled just before the ceremony, to thank Antje for a costly wedding-gift, spoke of another present, a—Antje could scarcely decipher the words—a charming statuette of bronze, representing a little Cupid with bandaged eyes. But the happy, thoughtless Hilda had not said a word of whence this present came—from what city or what country. Nor did the bridegroom mention his friend in the few earnest words that he sent ; there was only a heart-felt desire for her future happiness, an entreaty to be kept in remembrance, the hope of a future meeting. He, too, knew nothing definite, or, if he did, he would not speak of it.

Antje was brave and steadfast ; she tried to soothe her pain by work, and of this she had more than enough ; it was a marvel how she managed to attend to it all. The workmen made claims upon the new mistress, which they would not have thought of making upon the Frau Bergrath. The times were changed, and Antje understood this. She was always ready to consider just demands, but she had courage enough to put down all insolence, and this even in personal intercourse with the people. For when a gigantic workman called out to her an insolent threat—she was standing, raised a little above the people, on one of the steps in the hall—she turned him away with a few words, and his dismissal followed instantly.

Old Herr Kortmer and the young clerks in the

counting-house could not believe their ears ; and the former urgently entreated Frau Antje to cease her lonely walks, for the discharged workman was a revengeful fellow, and quite capable of anything. But Antje shook her head, with a smile, and that very same evening she went to the big, impudent fellow's house to tell his wife, who had a child three days old, that she could stay quietly in her house till she had quite recovered, and till her husband had found another situation. To be sure, she received no thanks for this ; the man, who was sitting at the table with clinched fists, said not a word, but his gloomy eyes spoke for him, and what they said was not reassuring. But Antje, apparently, did not observe this. Three days after, however, the great, tall fellow came to her and begged to be taken back again ; he said he had found that she was just and merciful, and he would never offend again. And Antje put him on probation, on the result of which depended his reinstatement.

The building of the new furnace was in progress, and the yield of the mine was excellent ; the business was greatly enlarged, and the number of workmen increased. Antje had the plans for the houses for the men and for the hospital lying on her work-table ; the contract for the new physician's dwelling-house had already been signed by her, and she was choosing the situation for it—it was to be a Swiss chalet. For the rest she lived a perfectly secluded life, for which her deep mourning afforded sufficient excuse. She did not know what explanation was given with regard to her husband's absence, and she did not wish to know. Herr Kortmer took care

to spread the report that Herr Jussnitz was travelling and studying in Italy.

The pastor's family was the only one Antje ever visited, and sometimes old Frau Kortmer came to have a chat with her, carrying her huge pompadour, which always held some little dainty for the child; and then they talked about the time when Antje's parents were still alive. Occasionally, also, the Frau Försterin made her appearance. She always liked to come, for on a little bracket in Antje's room stood a photograph of the "Witch of the Brocken," and the vain young woman took great pleasure in looking at the picture.

Antje employed her leisure hours in reading, and never in her life had she found so much time for this occupation. She discovered many treasures in her bookcase; she did not choose light literature, but selected instructive works, and history—above all, the history of art. She had read all these books before when she took lessons of the Herr Pastor, but now she read them again with eagerness and with newly-awakened intelligence. She had thoughts which would come when she had closed her book; the question concerning the future, to which there was only one answer,—“Patience!”—she tried to forget in the society of her child.

But a secret voice kept whispering in her ear, which spoke of hope and approaching happiness; she had a presentiment as if, somehow, the clouds which hung over her so heavily must part a little, a very little, to let one—only one—single gleam of hope shine through.

She went down stairs in the early morning into

the dining-room to take her breakfast. The cold gray light of an October morning shone through the window ; her cup looked so lonely on the great table, the tiny tea-pot which the maid brought in held tea enough for *one* person alone—the young wife could not touch it.

“ Five years ago to-day,” was the thought that kept passing through her mind. Five years ago to-day the sun had shone brightly into the room, and garlands and evergreen hung about everywhere ; five years ago to-day a fair young girl was sitting at breakfast with her parents for the last time. She could not drink her tea, because each one of the two old people had caught one of her hands and was kissing and stroking it. How rapidly the hours had passed, how quickly the moment came when a figure clad in white silk walked through the hall on *his* arm to drive to the church, with such pride and happiness ! And how soon the moment came when she got into the carriage to go away with him !

The young wife pushed away her cup, and said to herself, half aloud, “ I must not keep thinking of this, I must not ! ” But who can banish thought ?

She rose with an air of determination, pressed her hands for a moment over her eyes, and went through the counting-house into her study. The post-bag seemed to have been full that day, for as many as twenty letters lay on her writing-table.

A box also stood beside it on the floor, with the cover already taken off.

She read the letters, went to speak to Kortmer at his desk, and after a long conversation with him

came back to the study. As she was about to sit down to write, her foot struck against the box, and she laid down her pen, knelt down on the floor, and began to unpack it. What could it be? An endless amount of excelsior, hay, and paper—and at last a hard substance. She tried to lift it out, but it was impossible, it was too heavy. She touched the bell and sent for the porter. The sturdy Harz peasant had some difficulty in lifting out an object wrapped carefully in oiled silk.

“It must be made of stone or iron, Frau Jussnitz,” he said, as he placed the mysterious object on the writing-table, wiped the perspiration from his forehead with his apron, and went out.

But Antje cut the string which tied the wrappings, and tore off the paper; then she stood with clasped hands before a group in bronze, gazing at it in silence, and gradually a deep flush overspread her pale face, and a few glittering drops trembled on her long lashes. Wonderful alike in composition and modelling was this ideal figure of a man bending forward: he was standing on the summit of a great rock which he seemed to have just reached; his foot was already hanging over the precipice, and the next moment he would plunge over into the abyss, which his eyes, looking upward, did not perceive. There was a chain about his waist, and the other end of the chain was wound round a beautiful woman's figure; she, in chaste garments of antique fashion, was leaning against the rock, her hand holding a spindle, the symbol of womanliness and domesticity, the slender foot firmly placed against a stone on the ground, but her eyes were fixed on the

man. There was a wonderful expression of love and anxiety in the features of this young woman.

Below on the pedestal were engraved these words :

“ Well for the husband bound by such a chain !
From misery and death it draws him home again.”

And Antje understood—she understood the full meaning. She threw herself on her knees before the writing-table, and embraced the work of art in mute rejoicing.

Then she searched with trembling hands for a letter—a word ; but she found nothing. There was nothing but the bill of lading, which bore the name of a celebrated bronze-foundry in a Westphalian city.

And then she looked at the group, and at last she found on the rock at the woman's feet two little letters, “ L. J.,” the signature which Leo always put on his pictures. She leaned her head against the cold bronze and cried.

On that morning Antje was not accessible for business purposes ; Herr Kortmer attended to everything with a wondering shake of the head. But Frau Antje sat in her great sitting-room, writing private letters.

The old man said to his wife at dinner : “ Women are queer creatures, that I must say ; for six months she has been perfectly reasonable, and even devoted to the business, but to-day she happens to take it into her head to write private letters just at the time when she ought to have been attending to her affairs. And she has sent off a telegram to Herr Ferdinand Frey, to come here to coffee this after-

noon. I say, Frau Antje, there must be something behind all this !”

There was a very long conversation with Cousin Ferdinand. Finally Herr Kortmer himself was called in. He found two young people with eyes sparkling and cheeks flushed with eagerness and the ardor of enterprise.

Ah, and how Herr Kortmer opposed the monstrous plan ! Set up a bronze-foundry ? It was impossible, absolutely impossible ! How could they compete with the celebrated foundries in France, for instance ? Ah, there they have first-rate artists—for the mere casting, my friends, is not everything. You can find the metal in more places than one, and we could manage the composition ; but the *model* for the object to be cast, the *idea*, the *art*, my dear Frau Jussnitz, the *genius*—ah, yes—you will have to search far for that, it is not to be found by the wayside. No, it is impossible, quite impossible ! Or do you suppose an artist by divine right will come to you if you only whistle for him ? Good Heavens ! you might look forever and you couldn't find what you want—a man like that does not grow on every bush. No, you had better drop that idea, Frau Jussnitz ; I must advise you not to attempt it.”

The old gentleman excitedly helped himself to a pinch of snuff, and waved his red silk handkerchief ; and when he had gone through with this rather lengthened ceremony he looked up at Frau Antje and gazed into her laughing face. Herr Kortmer forgot to put away his snuff-box, for he had not seen his young mistress laugh for ages. And

when he looked across at Herr Frey he was laughing too.

The faithful official felt for a moment as though his confidence had been betrayed.

"Well," said the young wife, "we will manage the matter in this way, my dear Kortmer: I will first find the artist, the genius, and then we will set up the foundry with his help. And I hope I may be able to introduce you to this artist within a fortnight. I hope so," she added, in a lower tone, "for I do not know yet whether he—" Then she raised her head—"yes, I do know it too! In a fortnight, then. And pray, my dear Kortmer, look at this group and tell me how you like it."

She drew the old man toward the mantelpiece on which the work of art stood. The lamps which burned on either side of it lighted up the charming figures, which looked wonderfully beautiful in this light.

"Ah, a genius like that—you may look for a long time, a long time!" he said at length.

"Then you grant that the group is beautiful, my dear Kortmer?"

"Yes, so far as I am a judge, it is *very* beautiful! But I am very much mistaken if I have not already seen a picture of that thing. Good gracious! yes, just you wait a minute, Frau Jussnitz——"

And the old gentleman ran to the counting-room as fast as he could, and came back with a leaf of an illustrated journal.

"There, you see, Frau Jussnitz, that must be it, and here is something about it: 'Munich, August 30, 18—. In the department of bronzes and artis-

tic casts, the first work of a young artist has attracted much attention : 'Chains!'—original in conception, perfectly finished in the modelling, it is one of the most charming works in the whole Exposition. The expression of the woman's face, as well as the attitude of her whole body, has touched and charmed every spectator. Herr Leo Jussnitz, the creator of this work of art, has, as it is said——"

Antje had all at once caught the paper from the old man's hands, and read on : "has, as it is said, already in former years given evidence of great talent for sculpture. He worked for a whiel in the studio of Prof. L—— in Berlin, but, in spite of the encouragement of his celebrated master, turned his attention to painting until, after various disappointments, he again took up this other branch of his art."

Antje let the paper drop. She looked at Herr Kortmer, but the old man shook his head and turned quickly toward the door. There he stopped for a moment, took off his spectacles and wiped them, for they had been dimmed by a few unexpected tears.

"Well, then I suppose it will be so," he said, as he left the room.

Herr Frey, too, soon went away ; he would not intrude upon this happy agitated moment in the life of the young wife.

Soon after Antje finished a letter, and put it into the post-bag herself. It bore the address of the bronze-foundry in Westphalia. Enclosed was a smaller one to Herr Leo Jussnitz, which contained only the few words : "Come to us, to Antje and"—she had guided the little one's hand—"Leonie."



CHAPTER XXIX.

NEARLY two years have passed. A deep blue summer sky spans the Harz Mountains, and the air here is fresh and clear.

The iron-works, "Gottessegen," have changed somewhat ; new buildings have started up everywhere from among the green trees, and the workmen's houses have grown into quite a respectable village. The traveller must still penetrate to this remote region by carriage or on foot, for the railroad runs down below through the valley. But many strangers come up, nevertheless, through these splendid woods, for "Gottessegen" has grown to be quite a celebrated spot in the world.

To-day a stately man has descended at the Oberrode inn, "The Green Pine-tree," which boasts such delicious trout as are not to be found far and wide ; has ordered some of these same celebrated fish, and now takes occasion to inquire of the landlady, a stately woman in her fifties, about all manner of things up here. He has a rather weary expression in his face, and the fair hair and beard are already mingled with threads of silver.

"Do you mean that great house? That is the bronze-foundery ; you can see the manor-house as soon as you get to that open space ; the room for copies is under the studio, which looks out on the

garden. What did you say, sir? Ah, yes, that villa up there on the mountain? That belongs to a partner in the firm, Herr Ferdinand Frey, and in the Swiss *chalet* on the other side of the stream the doctor's family lives."

"Indeed—the doctor? What is his name?"

"Maiberg, sir; they have been here for about six months. You ought to have been here yesterday, and then you would have seen everybody; old Kortmer celebrated his fortieth anniversary at the works. It was a great festival, and every one danced at it, and no one more gayly than our mistress, and at last Herr Kortmer proposed three cheers for her. It was splendid, I assure you. You know Frau Jussnitz, sir—or don't you? Then you can't understand, even if I tell you, how fond she is of young and old! Ah, she is a mistress worth having, our Frau Jussnitz!"

The stranger remained seated for a while, ordered a room to be got ready for him, and then went up to the great house and asked for Herr Leo Jussnitz. He was in his studio, and the stranger was taken there at once.

The study was a handsome room, fitted up artistically, though not luxuriously; everything pointed to a distinct aim—it was a *work-room*. The young artist was standing before the clay model of a woman's figure, destined for a monumental fountain. He no longer has a flippant, soldierly air; his figure is rather bent, his color a little paler—the relic of his illness; but what the countenance has lost in freshness it has gained in depth of expression.

He gazed wonderingly at the stranger for a moment, then he called out joyfully: "Upon my word, Barrenberg, is it you? Where—where in the wide world do you come from?"

"I am stationed at Fort H——, down in the valley, and I would not miss the opportunity of seeing an old friend, and—well, I will say it, for it is no flattery—a celebrated and greatly admired artist. I congratulate you, Jussnitz; you have made a splendid hit!"

The two men shook hands. "How are you, Barrenberg?"

"Oh, I manage to drag along," was the laughing reply. But Jussnitz perceived the twitching of his face as he spoke. "Did your wife come with you?" he inquired.

Barrenberg sank heavily into a chair and looked down at his dusty boots.

"If you mean Irene von Erlach, you had better ask Signor Colani where his wife is. He is living with her in Florence."

Jussnitz did not know what reply to make to this.

Suddenly the door flew open, and a little girl rushed in, her hat hanging on the back of her neck, and her soft, gold, shimmering hair floating round her head. She threw her arms round Jussnitz's neck and kissed him.

"Papa, papa! Aunt Maiberg with Fred and Aunt Frey have come, and Fred keeps trying to walk, and he can't, and he always falls down. It is such fun!"

Jussnitz smiled. told his little daughter to shake

hands with the gentleman, and then begged him to come out with him.

Joyous voices float toward them from the veranda; on the gravel walk in front of it a colored nurse is playing with a dark-haired child.

The mistress of the house has recognized the new-comer at once; she approaches him with her calm, sympathetic manner. He looks at her in amazement. How she has developed in the warm rays of the sun of happiness which now shines upon her! "What a good and beautiful woman!" thinks Barrenberg, as he looks into her deep, shining eyes, and he sits down beside her after he has been introduced to the others.

His eyes wander about the room. That little blonde over there he does not recognize; it is Frau Frey. But that beautiful, slender woman in a white gown, with the dreamy dark eyes, is the little Spanish dancer of former days. Hilda is winding yarn which an old woman is holding for her. The latter is introduced to him as Frau Polly Berger, who is making her niece a visit.

Presently a lively conversation is in progress. Antje gives an account of yesterday's festival; Hilda tells them of her life in Brazil. "I cannot tell you," she says in conclusion, "how happy I was when I felt my feet once more on German soil. It was such a good idea of yours, Antje, to appoint Wolf to be your doctor here."

Thereupon she starts up and runs down the steps, catches up her stout little Fred, and kisses him so violently that the boy screams. She has to indulge in these little outbreaks now and then, or she could

endure the quiet. Then she comes back breathless, and sits down again with sparkling eyes. "Such a good idea, Antje," she repeats once more, looking up at the Swiss *chalet* which is her home.

"All my wife's ideas are good ones," says Leo pressing Antje's hand. She flushes deeply for joy, and plunges into a conversation with Barrenberg. And his anxious face grows calmer. Yes, Antje could venture to offer Hilda a home here, for it is evident that Leo's heart belongs entirely to his wife.

"I read a long article in the paper about your improvements a few weeks ago," says Barrenberg to the young wife. "May I see them?"

"To be sure," cries Jussnitz; "and the chief herself will do you the honor of being your guide."

She laughs and promises.

"I call it absolutely ideal, where art and technical construction go hand in hand," says Barrenberg.

That evening, Leo accompanies his friend back to the little inn. Barrenberg has declined Antje's proffered hospitality. "Not out of shyness, Jussnitz," he explains, rather hesitatingly, "but—I am not exactly envious—I am sure you understand me. Good-by, Jussnitz; you have won a great prize. Your wife is a beautiful woman and a clever woman, but her great merit is not in being capable of filling such a position—her great charm is her *goodness*, her true womanliness. But goodness, Jussnitz, that is the main thing! Signora Colani was not a nonentity by any means, but—for all the goodness of heart she possessed—! Ah——"

He presses Leo's hand once more, and then the latter goes back to his home.

In the dark garden a light figure comes slowly toward him. He puts his arm round her, and they walk up and down.

All at once he stops. "Barrenberg is right," he says, stroking her cheek; "goodness is the main thing. Where should I be now but for your goodness?"

"But for your *chain*!" she says in a slightly mocking tone, throwing her arms round his neck.

"Thank God!" he says, kissing her cheek—"thank God that there are such chains!"





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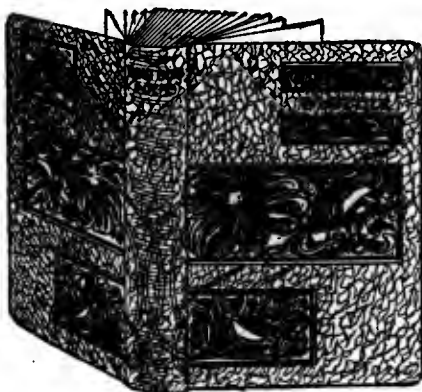
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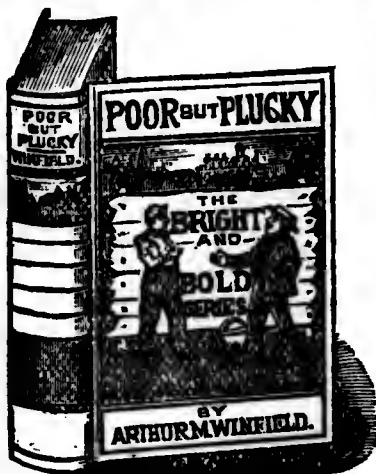
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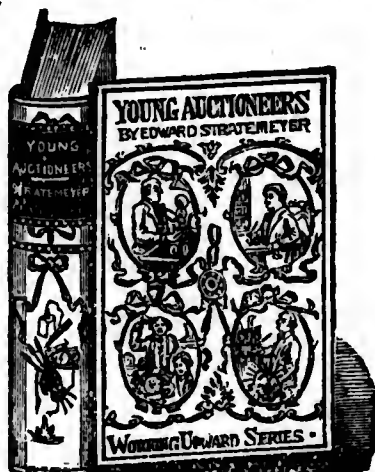
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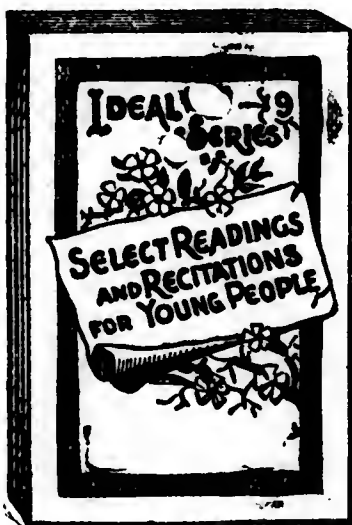
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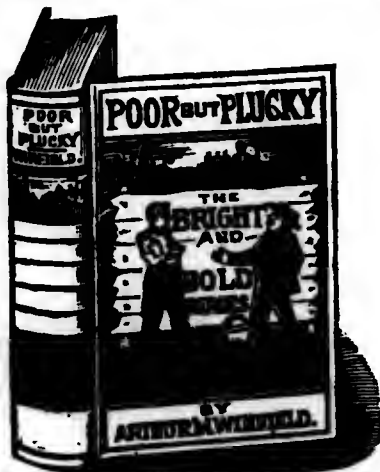
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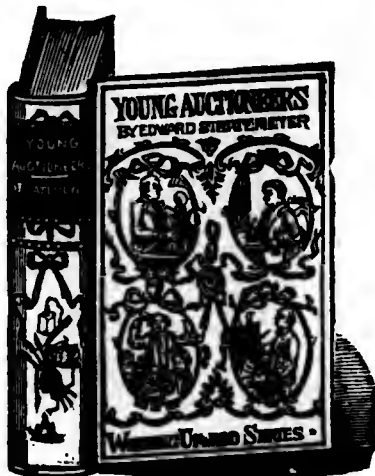
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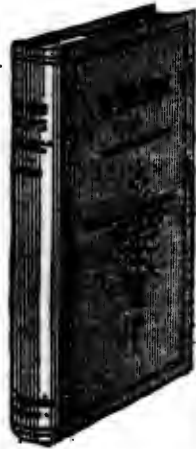
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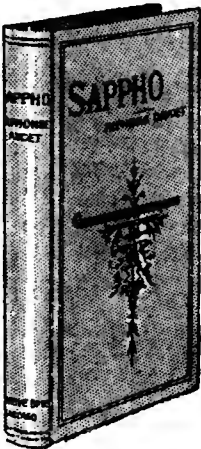
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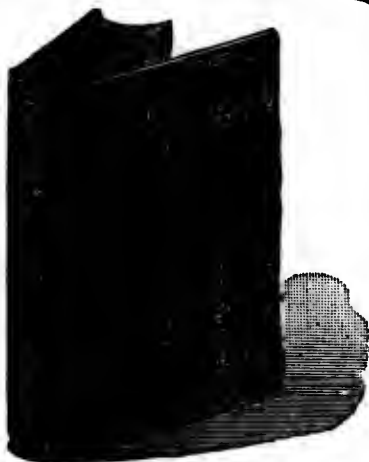
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